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Adventure

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The Marriage of Kettle

By C J Cutcliffe Hyne

SYNOPSIS: The steamer *Norman Towers* is caught short of coal in the midst of the Sargasso Sea. The first mate, Owen Kettle, whom Captain Saturday Farnish, easy-going and hard-drinking, has raised from a boy, shoulders the responsibility, picks the worst men of the crew and sets off in a boat on the desperate chance of getting coal from another ship. The German steamer *Rhein* is boarded by Kettle and practically captured. Miss Violet Chesterman, an English gentlewoman, tells Kettle that the *Rhein* was forced to stop because its engines had been tampered with by McTodd, a Scotch engineer with a sharp tongue, a colossal impudence, great efficiency and a humorous outlook on life. The coal and Miss Chesterman are transferred to the *Norman Towers*. At Liverpool Kettle is beaten insensible by thugs and rescued by Miss Dubbs, barmaid at the Masons' Arms. Later she secures him his first command, captaincy of the steamer *Wongaroo*, chartered by Sir George Chesterman to search the west coast of Africa for a wrecked steamer loaded with valuable copper. Kettle gives McTodd the berth of engineer. At Las Palmas, Violet Chesterman and Miss Dubbs, acting as her companion, come aboard the *Wongaroo*. Arriving off the coast of Africa, Kettle sets off in a small boat to search for the wreck. It proves to be the old *Norman Towers*. Miss Dubbs, meanwhile, jealous of Kettle's attentions to Violet Chesterman, breaks their engagement.

CHAPTER XIX

TICKLISH NAVIGATION

AFTER strenuous battling with seas flogged by the Trade, the *Wongaroo* steamed up once more to her station off the African Coast, and hooted impressively on her siren to announce arrival. That enormous siren, replacing one of the normal caliber for a 750-ton boat, was an extravagance which Captain Kettle almost coyly had wheedled out of the steamboat's cannie owner before leaving the Tyne.

A stained red flag on the top of a pole which was perched on the crown of a striped sand-dune blew out by way of answer, but the boat did not come out on that day or

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any of the three succeeding days. At intervals Miss Chesterman said she heard firing, but her brother, who prided himself on knowing a gunshot when he heard one, said that the noise was caused by the surf on the abounding reefs. The black-haired Miss Dubbs strained her eyes toward the shore till black shadows grew beneath them, but what opinions she had on the matter she kept to herself.

On the twelfth day the surf-boat came out, handled very dashingly under sail, ran with much smartness alongside, and emitted a spruce and sun-scorched Captain Kettle. After salutations had passed, a meeting was called in the privacy of the charthouse.

"Miss," said the little sailor, "I'm free to own I'm sorry to see you. I've been hoping all these days you'd have stayed behind in Las Palmas. And now, sir, the best advice I can give is that we run back and leave Miss Violet where she ought to be."

"What's wrong with the *Norman Towers?*

"Just this, sir. The Moors think she's their ship."

"And you're going to let it rest at that?"

Captain Kettle, as far as the action of the sun on his complexion would allow, flushed. "I thought, sir, you knew me better. The *Norman Towers* is your ship, and you're going to have her to realize on, as per contract, but there may possibly be a little trouble before we get her out, and I thought better that Miss Violet should be spared the seeing it."

"Danger, Captain, do you mean?"

"No, Miss. I prefer to call it trouble."

"Well, if you're appealing to me, my answer is that I shal'n't go back. And if you're trying to influence my brother, he will tell you he's attempted ever since I was in short frocks to make me do as he liked, and has invariably failed. So unless you've other and stronger arguments to bring to bear, I'm afraid you must still continue to put up with me as a member of your crew. Stewardess, aren't I, by the way, the same as Du—on the same official footing I mean as Miss Dubbs."

"I didn't see any other capacity under which to sign you on, Miss. The Board of Trade is very strict in these matters, and if you don't conform in the proper way and put in the foolish entries they want on the crew sheet and can go to sleep over, there's a correspondence started that'll last a ship's master half a life-time."

"Hadn't you better tell us exactly what you did find ashore?"

"That would be the best way, sir. Well, to begin with, what you see from here is not the coast, but a chain of small islands and reefs and sand-banks running along parallel to the edge of the mainland, sometimes a hundred yards away from it, sometimes two miles. The space between where we are now and the main opening is dotted with sand and lumps of stone just about as thick as the black squares on a draught-board, but not a bit regular. How the old *Towers* blew in there without touching—or if she touched, without breaking up—is more than I can tell you. If I was an imaginative man I should say that the simplest explanation was that she grew wings and flew in over the top. As I'm not that, the only thing I can think of is the Lord saw it was best for some one that she should get inside, and He sent a leading wind, and steered her in Himself. However, there she's got, and I must say that as far as the eye can tell she seems as sound as a bottle."

"But didn't you get on board to make a full examination?"

"I did not, Miss, this time. The Moors had taken possession, and as there were at least six hundred of them on her decks when we hove in sight, and as I'd only six of a crew in the surf-boat, I concluded to leave them where they were for the time being."

"And they shot at you? There, George, I told you those were shots we heard!"

"The *Norman Towers* has a couple of brass signal guns, Miss, and they must have brought some of their own powder on board, and used stone for shot. I suppose the noise and the powder smell pleased them, and the stones certainly didn't hit us, so all was well. If there'd been need, of course I should have gone on board, but as we were so to speak merely a reconnoitering expedition, and our job was to do a survey of the channel, I concluded to let them enjoy their war-dance in peace. All the same, I've got the idea there's a white man directing them.'

"How's that?"

"They're showing more savvy than it's good for natives to possess. And they're looking ahead, and that's a thing clear outside the ordinary colored man's contract. What do you suppose there would be on board that any Moor would care to loot? A few moveables that would perhaps add up to five or six hundred pounds in value.

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And then, when he'd got those, and started to break the port-hole glasses, and the gage glasses and the few skylight glasses, and smash the door-panels out of sheer light-heartedness, and to throw overboard hatch-covers and wheel-gratings and other trifles they didn't want, what would be the bill for damage to an old ore tramp like the *Norman Towers*? Call it another £500.

"Well, and after that, and when they'd got tired of trampling mud off their splay toes into the saloon carpet, and had looked through the reserve coal-bunker to make sure that wasn't the treasure-room, what would be the next move? Go home with what they'd got and swap lies about it round the kitchen fire. That would be the ordinary colored man's scheme of enjoyment. And if you asked him if he wouldn't take the steamer and her cargo along whilst he was there, he'd say he was much obliged, but really he'd got no immediate use for her. Do you follow my argument?"

"Yes, that seems all right. But aren't they doing as you say?"

"They're not, sir. They're arranging to hold the *Norman Towers* for keeps, and I tell you straight we're going to have a tough job in getting her away from them."

"But in wonder's name, what do they want her for?"

"That's what's bothering me, sir. That's why I seem to smell out the white man with the head-piece at the back of this pack of darkies, though even what his game is I can't guess. I tell you I'd be a lot easier if I could, because then one could fix up a plan to upset it, whereas as it is he's getting in all his moves undisturbed."

SIR GEORGE squared his big shoulders. "Can you get this boat in moderately close alongside?"

"Right up against her plates, if you want her there."

"Well, what's wrong with telling your beauties here with the rifles to pump lead into every one we see on the *Norman Towers*' deck till those that are left get sick of it and clear off? Then we proceed to make fast a tow rope and pull her out, and so across to Las Palmas, where we sell her for cash down to some enterprising juggins who's in need of an antique steamboat and a cargo of copper concentrates, and live happily ever afterward on the proceeds. Sounds beautifully simple."

"Far too simple, sir," said the little sailor emphatically. "I'm just convinced that there's a bad snag waiting for us to run ourselves against it somewhere. And will you please tell me what's the meaning of this they're quarrying?"

"Quarrying what?"

"Stone, so far as I could see. And it didn't look like a mine, either. There was a great chocolate-colored slab of rock sticking up out of the beach just beyond where the *Towers* was lying, and they were as busy on it as a hive of bees. There must have been seven or eight hundred on that job, and they stuck to it like little men all the time daylight lasted. They'd a night shift too, because we heard them working, though how many there were on that it was too dark to see.

Mark you, it wasn't work they were used to; they none of them seemed to have much skill in navvying; and though they'd got up a heap of iron bars and shovels from the stokehold, they seemed to prefer gathering fallen stone from the screens to splitting off fresh chunks from the face. Chocolate-colored stone it was; rummy looking stuff."

"Perhaps it's iron ore and they're filling the *Towers* down to her marks with it, as a present to the salvors for their kindness in coming to remove the eyesore from the local landscape."

"Well, it might be iron ore, or copper, or gold, or just plain stone; I'm not a miner, and couldn't say; but they weren't making any attempt to bring it on board. They were simply piling it in heaps along the beach."

"Did they look like building a fort with it?"

"I thought of that, but couldn't see a trace of it. If they'd intended putting up a building, one thinks they'd have piled their heaps four square, so as to be handy for the masons. But there was no arrangement like that. The heaps were, as I've said, all strung out in a line along the beach behind the *Norman Towers*, and there was no attempt at sorting out the stone, or squaring up the chunks. They might have been dumped there for road-making."

Sir George Chesterman was impressed. "Violet, I wish to heaven you were back at Las Palmas."

"And I'm devoutly glad I'm not. Do you think I'm not curious too?"

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"Oh, I'll admit your curiosity! But I'm getting to be of Captain Kettle's opinion; the one thing we are reasonably sure of arriving at out of all this is the unexpected. He said those fellows were as busy as a hive of bees. It will probably occur to your wisdom that bees sometimes sting, and when they do they can be disgustingly dangerous. I remember once, when you were a small child, you must needs stir up a hive in the Hall garden with a walking-stick. I remember the way you got stung about the legs."

"But if you know bees are going to sting, it's very easy to take precautions, and then they can't get at you."

"I tried being a bee-master once," said Sir George, pulling the big retriever's ear.

"Ah, sir, I envy you there. I always hope to retire from the sea some day and take up a country life."

"Then you take my tip and let bees alone. I always preferred to let the other expert handle them after I'd made the first few attempts."

"I think it would be most comfortable, sir, if you'd allow me just to run you and the ladies back to Las Palmas first before we tackled the job."

Sir George Chesterman lay back in his chair and laughed. "My good skipper," he said, "you're dangling the bait of a real lively new sensation before my nose, and then you propose to whisk it away, and put me back again in cotton wool. 'Oh Diamond, Diamond, you little know what you have done!'"

Captain Kettle pulled rather nervously at his red torpedo beard. "Then am I to understand, sir, that you——"

"I'm here to watch this business put through and to help as far as I can. You're the better man of the two, Captain, in every way, and you're in command now and I wish you to remain in command. I here and now resign my billet of idle passenger and critic of cocktails. I ask to serve under you, and am ready to take up any billet you think I'm capable of, from personal aide-de-camp down to assistant cook. Miss Chesterman also, if I know anything about her, will do every ounce she can, and if unfortunately any one gets hurt—well, I believe she once picked up some hospital training the month she tired of the sensation of being sweet on a doctor.

"The ship and all that's inside her is at your entire disposal, and if you want another ship and more men, say the word, and I'll get them for you. I'd no idea when I left England we were going to come up against what looks uncommonly like a private war, but by——now we're in for it I'm going to see it through!"

"The blood of the Chestermans is evidently stirred," said Violet. "I call upon you all to hear me deliberately utter the word 'Hooroo'! Captain Kettle, I endorse my newly awakened brother's words. I am yours to command."

'SIR and Miss," said the little sailor, ,'you shall never regret the confidence shown in me, and I'll pull that steamboat out, if I have to murder half the blacks in Africa to get her clear. It's not business, of course, to say such a thing, but a job like this always comes in sweeter to one when it turns out a lot harder than one had any decent reason to expect. I tell you there were nights in the surf-boat when we crept in to see what they were up to, when I could have sung to think what a hard nut that white man ashore was baking for me to crack."

"But I thought you were to make a camp on one of the islets, and sleep in a tent?"

"That was the scheme, Miss, but you see with these Moors all over the place, it occurred to me that they could either swim or raft themselves across to the islands at the other side of the lagoon if they felt that way inclined, and it's unpleasant having one's sleep disturbed. So we lived it out in the boat, and the watch below had the floorboards. Those bags of coal weren't wasted, either. We used them as anchors for three of our mark buoys. You see I didn't think it was worth while to go ashore and build those leading marks I spoke about, because it was as likely as not with a smart white man to put them up to it, the Moors would pull them down and build them in other spots, so that any one relying on them to run in by, would pile up his ship on some reef he'd calculated to avoid. You see, the trouble about the shore over yonder is that it's all made to a pattern, with no outstanding features that one can pick up to base a bearing on."

"But you took no stove on the boat. How did you cook?"

"We didn't. We just ate our tucker as

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it came, and were glad it was there. But I must say the hands got riled with one thing, and that was the gulls. The gulls on this station had evidently not seen a boat before, and they thought we were in trouble and would presently be chop for them, and they followed us day and night with their tired flap-flapping, or else swimming beside the boat, never winking, never sleeping, till the hands began to lose temper and wanted to use their rifles.

"Of course I wasn't going to let them waste your cartridges, sir, for a matter of sentiment, and told them that if they kept alive, which was what they were paid for, the birds wouldn't want to pick their eyes out. But I never could get them to see it that way, and just to show you how unreasonable hands are with an officer, I may say that I've had to attend to every one of my six—and most of them more than once—just because they were scared at seeing those birds always there and always staring at them with those shiny, unwinking eyes."

A fireman came up: "Chief Engineer wishes me to tell you, sir, he's got steam for eight knots."

"Right," said Captain Kettle. "Then as all is settled, Sir and Miss, I'll take her in at once."

There is a much-abused term that one often hears applied to mariners, and that such a one is a "daring seaman." It would pain me to see that label put to Captain Kettle. Plucky he was to the ends of his fingers, and resourceful, and skilful, and, when nothing else would serve, reckless. But he was never a man to take risks with any vessel under his command, when those risks could be legitimately avoided. He knew the capabilities of the *Wongaroo* to the last ounce. Under his command she had been tuned up, among other things, to give a full knot more speed than she had logged in coming down the North Sea.

Yet (thanks to the genius of a designer) she was probably the unhandiest little thing of her size afloat, and there was no getting over the fact of those unpremeditated sheers when the whim seized her, and from no other ascertainable cause she would at intervals and without the slightest warning take a sudden lunge to starboard from which no amount of helm would steady her until she had had her fling. The which was an uncomfortable habit when one was navigating her down a narrow fairway.

The run inshore was unnerving enough to the spectator. There was a moderate swell running, and though the bottle-green water did not break unless it was especially irritated, here and there little annular gardens of surf spoke of dangers out of sight.

As they drew nearer the shore and rose them to the eye, many of the reefs protruded, and the passage grew more and more ugly. Dog teeth of rock suddenly bit their way through smooth oily surfaces of the water, and as suddenly were sheathed, and in other places smooth whalebacks of sand were for a moment uplifted and as quickly eclipsed.

"IT ISN'T what you see in this beastly channel," Sir George muttered to his sister, "as what you don't see, that make the real dangers."

"It's a regular maze," Violet agreed. "I can't think how any one can thread it. What would happen, do you suppose, if we touched?"

"The odds are, I should say, the swell would break her back within five minutes, and we should either have to try the hotels on shore or try a cruise in the boats. Beginning to be sorry you came, old lady?"

"I wouldn't miss it for a new set of furs. But if we're anxious, what must any one responsible be?"

"If you mean the skipper, I've just walked for'ard till I could get a look up at him. He's stuck there on the upper bridge looking like a graven image. The man at the wheel's got his eyes about a foot out of his head, and that fellow Smith that he's given brevet-rank to as third mate is hanging on to the engine-room telegraph as though it was the only friend he'd got left on earth. I took a look down the engine-room skylight as I passed, and saw the old Chief caressing the throttle with his own fair fingers, and the great McTodd in pairson standing by the reversing gear. Oh, I tell you, Violet, everybody's quite up to the importance of what's going on, and ready to do every inch he knows if he's called upon! Great Scott, what's that? Pooh, it was only the backwash of that surf hitting her. But by the way the old tub trembled I thought she'd bumped on a rock."

In and out, first to starboard and then to port, the *Wongaroo* was danced, as the record of the hidden channel unreeled itself from Captain Kettle's brain and was trans-

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mitted per orders and human hands to the powers that governed her. Twice an angle was too acute for her to turn in her stride, and Kettle had to send her hard astern on a reversed helm to get her round. And up one narrow zigzag he backed boldly for a whole half-mile, with only a narrow canal of deep water to allow for mistakes, and spouting reefs on either beam ready to account for the smallest error of judgment or performance. But still I object to the word daring. It was merely an exhibition of iron nerve accompanied by perfect skill.

The water grew smoother as they crept inside the shelter of the outer reefs, and the channel grew more intricate.

"I swear no steamboat could have dodged in here," said Sir George after Kettle had taken the *Wongaroo* through a particularly intricate figure of eight, "without engines and a human crew to help her."

"The answer to that statement is that she did," retorted his sister. "What I can't understand is how any man can store up in his head all these little bits of distances, and changes of course, without a mark to help him except those half dozen trumpery buoys, and with prompt shipwreck as a penalty for the least mistake."

"To which I remark," was the brotherly reply, "that your own pet idol is doing it this minute before your very attractive eyes, so don't talk rot. Don't you think you'd better go below and get the steward to give you a cup of tea?"

"I do not in the least. But I suppose that's an intimation that you think we're getting to the end of the trip, and that once round the corner our African brothers may shoot at us."

"Yes—by Gad though, Violet, I didn't know we were so close! There's the *Norman Towers* opening out from behind that bluff. Did you ever see anything coated with a more flawless coat of rust? By Gad, look out!"

Instinctively Sir George stepped in front of his sister, who, just as instinctively took hold of his loose baggy old shooting-coat by the rear to drag him aside.

Then there came to them the shattering roar of a brass gun, loaded with black powder and fired at close quarters, the crash of a stone shot impacting on iron plates, and presently the tinkle of the gravel to which the shot had been reduced, dropping down upon their heads and into the water alongside, in a miniature hail-storm.

Sir George glanced up at the upper bridge. The little sailor, binocular in hand, cold cigar between his teeth, was standing there unruffled and fully occupied in his pilotage.

CHAPTER XX

THE HORSEMAN

SIR GEORGE CHESTERMAN put down the glasses and relit his pipe. "I'm hanged if I can make out those heaps of chocolate-colored stone you told us about, skipper. There's the cliff all right that you said they were quarrying from, but the shore below it is swept as clean as the floor of a ballroom."

"Yes, sir. That's one of the things that's bothering me a good deal."

"And I suppose the other is: Where have our dusky friends all bolted to? They bang off their tin cannon at us just as might have been expected, and then, instead of putting up the battle which one might reasonably suppose ought to follow, they calmly vanish. D'you suppose they're just lying doggo under decks till we are kind enough to call?"

"It's possible, sir."

"With their pockets full of paving-stones, the aforesaid, to fire at us when we pull alongside? By the way, could they have pocketed all the stone you saw?"

"No, sir, certainly not. There must have been thousands of tons of it. They were working, working, working, day after day, many hundreds of them. Indeed, the more I think of it, the more I am convinced the heaps didn't grow as they ought to have done."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"It almost seems as if they must have been carting it away under cover of night, while we were hanging about here in the surf-boat; and then as soon as our backs are turned, off goes the rest of it. As you say, sir, the beach now is swept as clear as a chapel floor over all the space behind the *Towers* and up to the foot of the cliff."

"Well," said Sir George, "they can't have evaporated into thin air, all of them. Suppose we just sit down and smoke for half an hour and see if we can't spot some one peeping at us either from the steamer or behind some bit of cover on the land side."

"With ladies to take care of here on

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board," said Captain Kettle with a sigh, "that's the best thing we can do. We must move very cautiously. We can't afford to take the usual men's risks."

So they set to work with binoculars and telescopes to search for what they could find.

On the Atlantic side the scheme of the land and seascape was simple enough. There was a long straggling row of reefs and islets, noisy on the outer edges with a white frill of surf and apparently tenanted only by sea-fowl. A Moor or two might certainly have been hidden in unseen folds of the larger dunes, but the mode of their ferriage across the lagoon was not apparent, and it was hardly likely they would have cut themselves adrift from any possible base.

Africa on the other side of the lagoon presented in that latitude an edge as straight as if it had been ruled, with the one exception of a small curved peninsula like a human fist and arm, mainly of chocolate-colored rock, which was thrust out into the lagoon; and in the hollow of this—the crook of the arm, so to speak—the *Norman Towers* was harbored. Beyond the straight edge of the hot yellow beach lay dunes of sand, which bristled here and there with clumps of dry gray grass.

"I can see birds running in and out of those grass-tufts," said Kettle, peering through his long old-fashioned ship's telescope. "They don't seem worried. They aren't attempting to fly. That shows there are no men about."

"Here's where I come in," said Sir George with a laugh. "Those are Barbary partridge, and about the most unsporting game bird to shoot at on the face of Africa. You have almost to kick them up before they'll rise to be comfortably shot. Try further, skipper."

The heads of live-oaks and argan-trees showed beyond the dunes, stretching over a wide flat, and then there were scrub-clad foot-hills and then steeper slopes that ran back into colossal mountains.

"The Atlas, I suppose, those big lumps at the back," said Sir George.

"Don't know, sir. I'm a sailor and my geography doesn't go inland past the beach."

"I think all the big mountains that run out to the Atlantic about here belong to the Atlas range, or one of its spurs. Is that cloud up at the top there, do you suppose, or snow?"

"It might be either."

"And there may be villages to any extent, or even towns for that matter, tucked away out of our sight in the valleys and folds of that range, and we should be none the wiser. I'm afraid, skipper, we can't trace the barracks of your black regiment by merely staring at the countryside."

"Just take a line, sir, please, over that palm-tree with the stem like a catapult. D'ye call that blue haze just a bit of heat mist, or is it cooking smoke?"

The sailor stared and his employer stared, and again they decided that it might be either.

"If you very knowing people," said Violet Chesterman, "will bring your eyes nearer home and take a look at the partridges again, you'll see they're all tending to run one way, and that's north. And those dotty little things among them are quail, I suppose."

"And by Gad, skipper, look there. Did you see that? And he was heading north, too."

"I saw a big animal, sir."

"Moroccan wild boar, and bolting like a good-un, wasn't he? Now his eminence the pig doesn't run out of the way of one man, nor, if he happens to feel that way, will he shift for forty. I should say there's distinct reason to expect visitors presently down at the southern end of the beach there."

"That's at the back of the *Norman Towers*, sir, where they were before. Almost looks as if the first comers had padded a good hard road to that point, and late callers stick to the same track. Well, it will simplify matters if they make a rule of that."

"The range from here to there is, say, four hundred and fifty or perhaps five hundred yards. Shooting will be a bit difficult across sand in this heat because of the refraction, but we ought to get on to the target after a shot or two. What do you say if we point out, when they begin to arrive, that we regard this section of the continent as part of the British Empire and that this isn't our at home day?"

"I want you to remember, sir, as I'm remembering," said Captain Kettle patiently, "that we've got ladies on board and can't afford to make mistakes. I know it means we shall miss some fun. But I want them to be allowed to make the first moves."

"Then," said Sir George, "that puts my

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rifle out of action for the time being, and, by the Speaker's Eye, there's the mark!"

THERE cantered out from behind the shoulder of a dune twenty splendid barbaric cavalrymen. Of the two who rode first, one, obviously an inferior, carried a white napkin blowing out from the end of his long gun-barrel, and the other alongside him was in command. They halted, and for a moment regarded the rusting *Norman Towers*. Captain Kettle, with some quick instinct of defiance (in spite of the words he had just uttered), laid hold of the *Wongaroo's* siren string and after a preliminary cough or two, to clear its throat, blew out a deep sonorous blast. The troop leader turned to his men, and through the glasses Sir George could see him laugh. Then he touched his horse with the sharp corners of his stirrup-irons and galloped north up the beach alone, without flag of truce, without escort.

Abreast of the *Wongaroo* he reined up, and his black stallion stood with forefeet at the water's edge and hind hoofs straddled out backward, as though it had been trained for the show-ring. The rider brought up a hand to his head-gear in salute, dropped it, dropped his reins, and sat there under the sunshine like a man carved out of iron.

"Wants to talk, I guess," said Captain Kettle. "I wonder what's his little game. Doesn't seem to have any idea we might shoot him, either."

"Well, you can't bawl at him across this distance. Besides, it's too hot for shouting. It would be interesting to hear what he's got to say. I lay a pound to a brick he'll start to prove that he's got no connection with the other darkies who whanged at us with the brass gun."

"He's a very splendid-looking man," said Violet from behind a pair of binoculars. "And anyway there's only one of him, so you needn't be afraid."

"Yes, I'm afraid all right, miss," said Captain Kettle grimly. "But we'll interview the gentleman for all that, if we can rake up any language among us that the other can understand. Mr. Smith?"

"Sir?"

"Call away that port quarter boat, and fetch off that man from the beach."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"During the interval, Captain, let me give you a cup of tea," said Violet. "The steward makes it himself now, so I can guarantee it's not been boiled more than half an hour. You needn't look anxious, George. That's an ambassador on the beach there, and while negotiations last there 'll be a truce. Afterward it may possibly be 'battle continued.' So let's drink tea while we may, and be thankful for the cook's new biscuit."

CHAPTER XXI

SIDI MOHAMMED BERGASH

IT WAS upon this domestic scene that the ambassador's eye first fell when he came up over the side. Captain Owen Kettle, as the complete ship captain, went to meet him, with his best air and his best Arabic.

"*Slamme*," said Kettle.

"*Aleikoom slamme*," said the visitor.

Captain Kettle reeled off a sentence or two to the effect that the day was fine, hospitality was waiting, and Allah was in his heaven. In the original it was a fine, sonorous phrase, but as the little sailor had picked it up from the Mecca pilgrim touts in Jeddah, half the words were very much debased Arabic, and the balance were made up of assorted unknown dialects.

However, it was all one to the visitor. He laughed and shook his head. "I am sorry," said he in English, "but I am a poor linguist. I didn't know you were Portuguese."

"By James!" thundered Captain Kettle, "if any man takes me for less than I am I'll kill him! And so you speak English?"

The visitor lifted his eyebrows. "I really don't see why not. I know you islanders think you monopolize the whole earth, but I never knew that you objected to share out your language."

The man spoke with a quiet, educated voice, without effort and without accent. By this time the other two at the tea-table had got over their first surprise, and Sir George got up and walked across.

"I'm sure," he said, "you'll pardon Captain Kettle's natural surprise. But really you look the Moor to the life in that kit, and any one might make a mistake. My name's Chesterman. Will you come and be introduced to my sister and have some tea?"

The visitor bowed. He had just the knack of an English gentleman's bow, not

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too much, not too stiff, and not in any way to be mistaken for the bow of other nations. And then he sat himself and his white draperies very comfortably in a big Madeira chair and crossed his red leather riding-boots and took up the cup that was offered him.

"The taste of this will come back like an old memory," said he. "We use green tea, you know, down here, and take it with green mint and a lot of sugar."

"I tried it once in Tangier," said Violet. "We ran over there for the day from Gibraltar. I don't think I could ever get used to it. Have you really come to like it?"

"I was brought up to the taste, you see."

"Then have you been out here a long time?"

"Ever since I came down from Cambridge, with an interlude once of a week also in Gibraltar. I took a pony over there to race."

"Then have you—I mean are you——" the usually glib Miss Chesterman was at a loss for a way to put it. It dawned upon her that this visitor in the Moorish clothes, head-gear bound round with camel's-hair rope, gold-sheathed hook dagger hung over one shoulder, gold-mounted pistol over the other, this man from the interior of Africa was an Englishman. Come to notice him more closely, his hair and his beard were brown and his eyes were blue, and though his complexion was somewhat dark, that of course was the sun. And anyway many southern Europeans were far darker than he.

He was an Englishman and a Cambridge man, and he had kicked over the traces somehow at home and discreetly vanished into the mysteries of Africa. Those, it flashed across her, were the outstanding points of his biography. "Do you like the country in there?" she asked as a compromise.

"It has its points. But then perhaps I'm prejudiced. You see, I am used to it."

"I said," put in Captain Kettle pointedly, "from the very first moment I saw the way those natives were being handled on the *Norman Towers* that there was a white man in at the back of this business somewhere."

"So?" said the visitor, with polite indifference.

"I was up at Cambridge," said Sir George. "Clare was my shop. But I should be a lot senior to you," and he mentioned his year.

"By Jove," said the visitor, "that's a queer coincidence! I was next door to you, at the Hall. But I didn't go up till two years after you came down. Funny place, Cambridge. I took up Arabic for my special, and they plowed me and mainly on my accent, too, I'll trouble you! But I stuck to it, and got a B.A. all right—took Pol.-Econ. Gad, I wonder what it would feel like going back to take one's Master's!"

"I can tell you. I took mine. You meet only gyps and tradespeople and bedmakers that you know, and you wonder why the dons are all so dirty, and the undergrads are all such babes. The only decent man I met up there that I'd known before was old Heber, the pawnbroker. I took him to the Bull and dined him, and he gave me all the news."

"I've often regretted," said the visitor, "that I never pawned anything when I was in England, so that one could look back and know how it was done. Going to a pawnbroker's when I was at the Charterhouse was for some reason or other considered bad form. They were awfully narrow in some ways. And I'm afraid some of the Charterhouse superstitions stuck to me even after I'd rubbed about at the Hall."

"All the public schools have their fads," Sir George admitted. "That's why we pay £200 a year for the privilege of going to them. So you were at Charterhouse? I wonder if you were there with my cousin Fred?"

"Fred Chesterman? I should think I was! Not that I knew him. He was a big chap in the Sixth when I was a wretched little shaver at the bottom end of the lower school. But he was a great god of mine. He was the school soccer captain my first year, and fired me with ambition to play association football. I didn't do so badly either; got into the school team; played for the Hall, for the matter of that, though they were no good; but I never managed to get my blue, which was the real thing I was keen on. Sorry, Miss Chesterman, for boring you with all this schoolboy shop, but I haven't had a chance of letting out for a lot of years, and really your brother led me on."

"I beg your pardon," said Captain Kettle, "but were you born in England?"

"I was not. Clare did a big line in cricket, if I remember my records right, about the time you were up."

"I think Clare's always been a big

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cricket and rugger college," said Sir George, "just the same as the Hall put in most of its time at the boats. Rowing was my line, though, and that is the reason, I suppose, why I've rather run to flesh. That's the usual fate of the rowing man when he comes down."

AWAY they went once more on Cambridge shop, Violet putting in her word now and then, and Captain Kettle, who felt outside this circle, trying his best not to glower too openly. The little sailor, it must be remembered, was holding his first command, and the weight of it rode heavily on him; but always throughout his life it is on record that the business of his owners came first, and social pleasures a bad second. This easy-mannered visitor was in Kettle's opinion a good deal too clever in his conversation to be entirely wholesome, and, in fact, he had felt a natural antagonism toward him from the first moment of the man's stepping on board.

If he had had only his own sentiments to consider, he would have thrown him neck and crop over the side. But as it was, in his own phrase, he felt himself in a clove hitch. The policy that he himself felt to be for his owner's good was exactly opposed to the policy that the owner was obviously prepared to take, and Kettle felt that never was young shipmaster on the horns of a more cruel dilemma.

But at the risk of offending, Captain Kettle doggedly followed up his points when he saw a chance. "Have you lived here a long time?" he asked when the next lull came.

"Some people might call it long," the visitor replied with easy indifference, and went on to discuss with Sir George the nice point of introducing Hungarian partridges to stir up the local Barbary bird.

"Of course it's a toss up if they'd cross," said Sir George.

"And I should make myself very unpopular with my neighbors if I produced a fowl that could fly. The sportsman hereabouts goes out with a gun six feet long, and waits half a day till he gets three partridges in a row on the ground, and then lets drive at them. You see, the breech-loading shot gun isn't a common object of the countryside in this part of the world. In fact, my own are probably the only pair of twelve-bore ejectors in this part of Africa. Purdey built them for me before I came out, and I tell you I had a very awkward job of it smuggling them into the country in spite of the fact that I've got of course a bit of personal pull."

"The worst of buying those Hungarian partridge eggs is that I believe fully ninety per cent. of them are poached."

"Then if that's the case, the experiment, as far as I'm concerned, must drop. We're a pretty lawless crew out here over game laws, but if one hears of a man preserving, whether it's in Hungary or in Norfolk, one naturally feels bound in common decency to back him up. But I suppose one could get eggs legitimately produced on a proper game farm if one was prepared to pay for them."

"Certainly. Of course pheasants' eggs are their principal product at those places. By the way, why not try pheasants? You've plenty of cover, and if the partridges can find food, they should too. You ought to get fine rocketing shots if you had rides out in the proper places among some of those steep woods."

The visitor laughed and stretched out his hands. He had small and beautifully shaped hands, and they were very carefully kept. "You must remember we're rather out of the world down here, and there's a good lump of the Atlas and a number of very unfriendly people between here and Mogador, which is our nearest steamer port. I have tried importing pheasants' eggs three several times, as it happens. I calculated the date the boat would arrive, and had relays of men strung out between here and there to run them along without delay, but as each time the experiment has been a fizzle, one got a bit discouraged. You see it takes a couple of hundred men and a good deal of organization to string out one's line of runners."

Sir George Chesterman stared. This broken-down university man whom he was prepared rather to pity and was open to help was evidently a person of some considerable local position. He had not spoken in the least boastfully; in fact the egg tale had been told with the humorous touch that a man usually gives to a story told against himself. What on earth could be his history?

Captain Kettle took advantage of the lull, and followed up his subject doggedly.

"Then one might take it you lived here?"

"One might." The words were a trifle of-

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fensive, but a smile took the edge from them.

"A local landowner, in fact?"

"Oh, I think I am."

Captain Kettle could have shaken Sir George and Miss Chesterman just then. Why did they not back him up in his search for sound information, instead of turning the conversation back again to what (he considered) were further inanities?

"I suppose you brew your own powder and make your own shot here up country?" asked Sir George.

"Most of them do. All the big tribes in the Atlas have their own powder-mills, and when we run out of bullets we mine lead and do a bit of smelting. But for Winchesters we import cartridges, and I'm afraid I'm extravagant enough to do the same for my shotgun ammunition. Kynochs would probably be surprised to know that their cartridges cost about eighteen pence apiece by the time they reach me here. But then of course you jealous nations outside are to blame. You put up an absurd interfering law making it an offense to import arms of precision into this part of Africa, and as you have your war-ships to back you up, and we are not naval folks, cartridges cost us about seven pounds a hundred instead of some ten shillings. But of course we get them all the same if we like to pay."

"You take it easily. It's that small item of paying that makes things so hard for some of us."

The visitor laughed. "I apologize. I should have remembered. Here for—well, for us—you see it's only a case of sending out a handful of one's men to do a bit of mining, and the gold slugs trickle out to the coast and come back as coin. We don't show riches in this country; it's not particularly safe to do that; but it's quite as well to have them within reach, as I suppose it is all the world over."

"Then if you're a well-off man," said Captain Kettle acidly, "may I ask what you are after the *Norman Towers* for?"

This time there was no doubt about the visitor's dislike. Hate for an instant gleamed out of his blue eyes, and was as quickly veiled. But he did not pretend to infuse cordiality into his voice. "My good Captain Whatever-your-name-is, I don't want your wreck. And by the way, now we are on the subject, you might kindly tell me, is she yours?"

"My owner has bought all the rights in her from Lloyds."

"Ah, Lloyds. An eminent corporation in London, I believe. Then you had better get Lloyds to give you delivery of your bargain."

"Won't you?"

"I? What on earth have I to do with it? I'll give you a piece of local information, if you like, not that I imagine for a moment that it will satisfy you. The law of Lloyds, for anything I know, travels over the seas that Lloyds control. But their writ's not current here, and local custom has a different law. Local custom, here, south of the Atlas, says that jetsam on any beach belongs to the beach's owner."

"You can't uphold such a rule?"

The visitor shrugged his shoulders. "Possibly. At any rate I'm not going to try. You say she's your steamer. In that case you'd better take her away—if you can. She doesn't interest me, and I'm not going to burn my fingers over your affairs. Why, who is——"

The visitor stood to his feet and, bowed and turned down his glance. Miss Dubbs had come on deck, handsome in face, opulent in hair and figure.

"You!" said Miss Dubbs.

The visitor looked up quickly, but was plainly puzzled. "I'm afraid I've forgotten, madam."

"I should never forget your eyes, though I was only a little girl at the time, Mr. Bergash. Perhaps you'll remember me when I tell you I put sticking-plaster on your face where you cut it after your bicycle threw you into father's front gate. You've got the scar still there over the cheek-bone, I see. And what's become of the other gentleman who called you 'Saint'?"

"Oh, he's come to a bad end. He's an attaché at one of the fashionable British embassies somewhere in Europe." He turned to the others. "Perhaps I'd better introduce myself. I'm Sidi Mohammed Bergash. I can't help the saintship," he added whimsically. "That descended to me."

"Then you're a Moorish chief—or sheik—or whatever you call it?"

"No, sir. Very much the reverse. I'm a Berber, as my fathers have been for a matter of three thousand years, in spite of various attempts by Romans and Saracens and Moors and these parvenu nations to

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conquer us. And I'm *kaid* of that country up there in those mountains."

CHAPTER XXII

THE COUNTRY OF THE BERBERS

I BELIEVE that the Republic of San Marino in North Italy, and the somewhat squalid republic of Andorre in the Pyrenees, make the proud boast that they have never been conquered. But discourteous people might point out that there is nothing in either of them to attract the appetite of a conqueror. Thibet of course has suffered a downfall, and the North Pole has fallen. So the Mayan section of Yucatan, and the Berber villages of the Western Atlas remain the only countries of the world to-day worthy of envy that have not been polluted by the foot of the invader.

All modern rulers of Mexico from Don Hernando Cortez to Don Porfirio Diaz have tried to annex the interior of Yucatan—and failed; and throughout all the ages all the successive powers from the Romans to the present Moors who have held Morocco have been similarly unsuccessful in their attacks upon the Berber strongholds in the Atlas mountains. It argues, if one comes to think of it, some particular trait of strength which keeps these two small districts alone of all the vast acreage of the globe unexplored by the pushing white man, unannexed by some other hungry nation, undisturbed by that standard which other people have been pleased to set up as civilization.

Old Kaid Bergash (father of the man Captain Kettle disliked so keenly on first sight) was a tough old warrior who ruled his tribe with a rod of iron, and was an authority on tradition. He lived in a stone castle built on an entirely inaccessible spur of the Atlas, and his tribe lived there with him, and within its walls stored all their principal gear and worldly goods. The castle's ground space inside the walls measured barely an acre and a half, so that when a man or a family needed more house-room they built a story on to their existing dwelling.

Some of these huddled sky-scrapers towered as much as five stories above ground level. But that was the limit. One or two ambitious architects had tried for greater heights and had brought their whole structure crumbling in ruin. At least there was a tradition that this had happened in the year 1492 A. D. when the Moors of the Moroccan lowlands were busy in Spain, and the Berber increase was not kept within reasonable limits by war.

Below the surface of the rock great hollows had been dug out in very early days for grain and water storage, and the fact that the tribal flocks and herds were stabled in the ground floor of the houses above and gave the water a good ammoniacal flavor was not a trifle to disturb a Berber palate. And anyway the tribe had flourished on the arrangement for a matter of some three thousand years. The engineer of these caverns was a sapper who had served his time as a mercenary of Carthage, and except that he seems to have run to a taste for heavy bronze doors and lids to his bins, he seems to have done his work efficiently and well.

He was an expert on sieges, and laid down the law that there should always be kept in store four years' corn, three years' forage for the animals, and six years' water; which provision has proved efficient on many historical occasions, and is accordingly maintained to-day. There is also a well in the middle of the castle, which has been dug down through the rock during sieges—the sinking was spread over four hundred years—and after the first four hundred feet it goes down in inclines set spiral-wise round a solid central core. But as they had to drive downward a matter of twelve hundred feet before they struck water, and the air down there is very bad, the well is only looked upon as an additional guaranty and is in reality never used, except in moments of very great hardship.

On three sides the castle rock drops practically sheer into the valley, which is a trifle of twelve hundred feet below. I fancy there must have been a few projections once, but those stout-hearted old fellows at the back of time who built the place must have slung one another with rawhide ropes down the face of the precipices and chipped and drilled and quarried with their bronze tools till all possible footholds dropped down below. Afterward they squared the bits and carried them up to the top again, round by the path, to use as building material.

There was nothing Carthaginian, or for that matter African, about the building of their outer wall. That had quite the Roman touch. It was eight to ten fee

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thick, all of tooled stone, with no rubble packing, and all held together by a mortar that was a good deal harder than the stone itself. The one gateway, on the causeway side, was just wide enough to admit a fat cow, and no wider, and the height of a camel's hump. The dwelling-houses for man and beast inside were less pretentious. They had not been built for eternity, and, after the fashion set by the Pharaohs, the Jews and the Carthaginians for domestic buildings, were for the most part constructed of adobe, which is quite good for say three hundred years or so, if only you keep the weather out by a good outside skin of plaster.

The causeway, too, which was the only road by which one could get into the castle, was quite a notable feature in its way. Originally it had been part of the spur on which the castle was perched, but it had been shaved down the sides here and built up at the edge there, obviously on some Roman or Carthaginian model, till to-day it looks like an aqueduct such as one may see for example near Tunis, only with the arches filled, and with men and animals instead of water coursing along the gutter at its top.

Two cows abreast can get along that causeway, if they are not fat cows; or two horsemen, if they crook up their outside legs so as not to interfere with the parapet; or three footmen if the middle man does not swing out his elbows. The length of it from the little gateway in the big wall to where it fans out into bare hillside is some two hundred and fifty to two hundred and eighty yards, and the drop over the parapets averages anything between fifty and ninety feet sheer.

Furthermore, it is an exception to all modern Moroccan rules of architecture in that it is kept in excellent repair. In modern times—say, since 745 A.D.—the Berbers have grafted a not very rigid Mohammedism on the asserted brands of paganism which their mercenaries down through the former ages brought home with other loot. They admit in theory that every man's fate is written on his forehead and that what Allah has ordained will come to pass. But they maintain that Allah writes the choicest things for those who help themselves, and so they keep their defenses rigidly efficient, and they discourage the intruder fatally.

NOW Sidi Ibrahim Bergash (of pious memory) had one wife who occupied all of his tenderer affections, and as she continued at decent intervals to bear him sons, he took no other. During the years he ruled over the castle and the tribe, seed-time came at its appointed periods and harvests followed. One year in twenty came the blight, which was bad; one year in fifteen, the locusts, which were worse; and one year in ten, the Sultan, who was worst of the lot. It was the Sultan's habit to camp an army among the corn-fields in the valley, and if not bought off, to ravage that valley down to the last blade of corn and the last straying goat.

He could not smoke or shoot the Berbers out of their castle, and the Berbers could not cut up his army, because it was too big; and although the residents did creep out at night-time and try a little sniping, two can play at that game, and the Sultan's men, besides being clever soldiers, had such an extremely bad time of it in this world that they were indecently anxious to be sent to Paradise, and, in consequence, inconveniently reckless.

So that on the whole it was only the younger and rasher spirits among the Berbers who tried much retaliation, and the elders, with households to provide for, generally found it profitable to pay enough taxes to buy off the balance of their crops. But be it clearly understood they did not one little bit like paying and never accounted themselves the Sultan's subjects or even his vassals.

Slings, the longbow and the crossbow had from time immemorial been the Berbers' missile-throwers, though, like the Balearic, they had always had, and have to-day for that matter, a weakness for the sling. Black powder and the short-stocked gun with a five-foot barrel have crept among them these latter years, but, owing to their inefficiency and the difficulty of coming by them, have achieved no vast popularity. It remained for Saint Ibrahim to discover and lust after the rifle.

His holiness, as it happened, was one day at the northern edge of his marshes, where the Atlas foot-hills curve out into the plain and the temperate climate of the mountains verges into a tropical heat. He was over on that side on the matter of a cohort of wild pig raiding among some of the tribal corn, and being a keen sportsman and finding

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the pig plentiful, stayed down there a whole week and slew fourteen fine boars to his own spear (whereof, by the way, the tusks remain as hat-pegs in a set of rooms in Trinity Hall to this day).

Upon this innocent amusement there descended without warning the advance scouts of a Sultan's army, and the sportsmen and beaters ran or rode for their lives in fourteen different directions. Three beaters and a cousin of the Kaid's were captured, and his Highness the Sultan with that paternal care for his people for which he was noted and which so endeared him to them, cut off the hands and feet from these and set them to crawl back to the mountains as heralds of his approach.

The Saint, however, wily old fighter that he was, had rallied the balance of his men, had swung round in cover, and charged in most dashing style through the Sultan's rear-guard just as the army had unsaddled for the midday halt. It is estimated that he hustled forty-seven true believers into Paradise, left wounds on another score that would annoy the houris hereafter, and spread an unclean odor of pig among the faithful that it would take at least a pilgrimage to the Prophet's tomb at Mecca to cleanse away. Also from an officer (deceased) he took a gun. And as an afterthought charged back again through the scattered soldiers and secured the ammunition which served it.

This gun, which happened to be an early pattern of the Winchester repeater, pleased his Holiness much; within five minutes he had grasped its mechanism and proved its value on the target so satisfactorily that three more mothers in Islam were left to mourn sons who had served among the Sultan's infantry. And these hits were made at under two hundred yards' rise; it never occurred to the pious man that a gun could carry farther.

But in the pursuit, which was hot, he tested the weapon at longer and longer ranges, till at length (having mastered the mechanism of the sighting) he sent his man to Paradise accurately enough at eight hundred and fifty yards, and felt that a new element had entered into the science of warfare. The trifling detail that the long stock to which he was unaccustomed kicked violently on to his cheek and cut it to the bone did not concern him in the least.

Of the Sultan of Morocco, as it happened, no more was seen that year. It may be that business called him elsewhere; it may be that the long-range fire of that desperate rear-guard action put the fear of Allah into him; but the Saint retired to his castle in peace, and what is far more to the point, his fertile valley lands remained unraided, and the decennial blackmail was not asked for.

For many weeks thereafter Sidi Ibrahim drank his green tea and smoked his pipe of *keef* with a mind that wrestled with big things. A new factor had arisen in honest warfare. The god of battle, who was one of the old Berber mythology before the new-fangled Mohammedism had been forced upon the tribe, the god of battle had grown a longer arm. Yesterday if you shot at a man with all the good will in the world at a hundred paces rise, the odds were that three times out of four you missed him. To-day, when the Gaiour gun with the stripe inside the barrel had been restocked and reheel-plated to suit a true believer's grip, you could kill running pig with it at six hundred yards without a miss. And then, *bis m'illah*, there was its damnable faculty for firing ten shots in ten heart-beats—and being reloaded in ten heart-beats more.

THE more the holy man thought over the points of the gun, the less he liked them; but he recognized facts when they came against him; and when his chief adviser in the Elders' Council suggested that the gun was produced by witchcraft and might well be sent to Eblis whence it came—well, his language was merely irritable, and not saintlike in the least.

Finally, after a year's thought, he came to a decision. There were things abroad that threatened the existence of the Berber nation in the Atlas, and the origin of them must be sought out. Only one way of effecting this showed itself; he must send a son to the land of the Gaiours to learn the Gaiours' ways. With moody eyes he inspected his infant brood and wondered which one of the six to send. But soon he decided that there could be no question about the choice. It must be the apple of his eye, his eldest, the going-to-be, saint who would follow him in the saintship who must depart to this accursed shore to learn how saints in these modern days kept up their state and dignity.

And then, being a thoroughly capable man in perfecting detail, he went on to insure that his venture should not miscarry.

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The despised Moor, who held the low country, was, he knew full well, incompetent for such a business. The Moor was good for nothing but a fight. The detestable Yahudi (Jew) was the only man of affairs (shameful as it was to own such a thing) in all wide Morocco. So the Saint sent kidnappers into the city of Mogador (where the London and Hamburg steamers call), and in fulness of time they returned with six men of Israel bound and trembling.

To the ordinary eye they were unappetizing scoundrels, who were born cringing, who begged as a habit, and who did not blunder into telling the truth more than once between Ramadan and Ramadan. And the potentate, whose ancestors had as mercenaries under Titus helped to storm Jerusalem in the year 70, did not handle them with undue delicacy.

Said he: "I know you vermin stick together. So I shall retain you here as hostages while your fellow dogs of Yahudis elsewhere carry out that which I wish to be done. Beyond that curtain is my son, my eldest, a man of thirteen years. Him I wish taken to the country of the N'zaranees, and throughout eight years taught all the things the Gaiours know."

"But it will cost money, much money," one of the captives yammered.

His Holiness nodded to a pair of experts. "Throw that dog upon his face and beat the soles of his feet till he has purged his offense in speaking unasked to one whose forebears married the Prophet's sister. My son is a prince's son, and though in truth he must not be known as such in the Gaiour lands (lest ill befall him), all the money that shall be due for his maintenance and teaching shall be freely provided."

The five remaining Jews lifted their hands to their foreheads in acquiescence with such unanimity that they might have been one Jew.

"And for the sure performance of this task you five—and that dog also, if he lives—will stay here as hostages, drawing what moneys please you, and seeing that your fellow dogs in Mogador do my will. When the young man returns, if he has gained the knowledge required, you will be free to go to your homes, you and your loads of gold. But if he returns not, or if he returns without all the knowledge of the Gaiours, then I will send down to Mogador your skins stuffed with straw, as a sign of my displeasure. You have my permission to go back to your cell."

NOW the Jewish organization all the world over is singularly complete, but in North Africa, under the stress of Moslem persecution, it has grown to a marvelous perfection. The cringing, verminous person in the black *jellab* and skull-cap who is nominally a buyer of hides in a small way in Fez, really reports on the political omens and market outlook in that capital to retiring co-religionists in Casa Blanca and Mazagan. These send on their knowledge while it is hot and fresh to fellow tribesmen in Europe and the United States, who, when such information is of value at the moment, transmit it in turn, and, for the usual consideration of course, to the big Semitic banking houses in London, Berlin, New York and Paris. When any news of importance transpires anywhere in all the world these get it first, the Gentile financiers next, the press next, and then the British Government.

The Hebrew hostages in the Saint's stronghold held anxious, trembling council, and then took their measures with decision and vigor. They passed in review Spain, which always looms with a bigness out of its true proportion in Moorish eyes; Germany, already famous for push and advertisement, and complacent Great Britain, which never seemed to ask but always appeared to get; and Britain won the ballot. The case was laid before a great banker in London, and he, as though such matters came within his every-day business, made the arrangements.

It is perhaps worthy to be put on record that there was no question of sending the lad to be educated by Jews. The Hebrew of to-day always prefers Gentile methods. And besides, an Israelitish education, if such a thing had been procurable, would have cost skins. The tough old Saint in the Atlas was frankly anti-Semitic in his tastes.

The London banker sent out first of all a tutor to Mogador. The man was to take a house, furnish and staff it efficiently, and give the mountain boy the first course of his new education. In other words he was to teach him a working modicum of the English language, introduce him to trousers and a hard collar, and break him in to knife and fork. The tutor was paid £500 a year

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over and above expenses—and earned it.

Next came a couple of years at a carefully chosen preparatory school, and then, when the boy was described by an expert as unmistakably English, he went to Charterhouse, and so on, in due time to the university.

He was probably one of the most narrowly watched schoolboys in Europe during this period. All the tremendous organization and skill of Israel in London, urged on by their hostage coreligionists in Sidi Ibrahim's fortress and furnished with unlimited means, guided and guarded all his movements, and the result could not fail to be efficient. The boy made neither boast nor concealment about his origin. He grew up among the sons of soldiers and parsons, peers and butchers, grocers and dramatists, stockbrokers and princes, and got molded into the public school caste, and was taught (via Greek, football and fives) how to rule men justly and efficiently when his time came to do so.

The only mistake about the whole scheme was that they made three-quarters of him into an ordinary English gentleman, and in Great Britain, at any rate, the remaining twenty-five per cent. of Berber was so much submerged as to be unnoticeable.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DARK NIGHT

"THANK you, sir," said Captain Kettle, "but I'll not step down to dinner this evening. As soon as dark comes away I'm going to up anchor and as quietly as may be move the *Wongaroo* across to another berth. Mr. Bergash may be all right, sir, as you and Miss Chesterman appear to think, though we've only his word for it, and though you must allow me to still hold my own opinion. But there are two thousand dark Africans either on the *Norman Towers* or lying hid near her, and they aren't doing that for the good of their own health—or ours."

"Have it your own way," said Sir George rather stiffly. "But I think you're carrying prejudice too far. I've lived in Louisiana, and I've lived in India, and I've as much dislike for the black man otherwise than as a black man as it's possible to have. I've got no possible use for the ignorant Exeter-Hall, Uncle-Tom's-Cabin theory of a man and a brother. But I'm not wilfully blind. This fellow isn't an African negro any more than I am. He's a blue-eyed, pure-blooded Berber."

"Well, sir," retorted Kettle doggedly, "he may be Neapolitan if you choose, and I'm sure his tongue's glib enough for it; but I don't like him, and there you have a solid fact. I can't talk Cambridge College and polo in the moonlight to him like you and Miss Violet do, but I can listen and I can use my eyes, and if Mr. Bergash is here for philanthropy alone, and not for Mr. Bergash, well, I'm content to have my ticket indorsed for incompetency."

"Right," said Sir George shortly, "then if you won't dine with him, you won't. Can I send you anything up?"

"I'd like, sir, a sandwich and a bottle of beer, if the steward would bring me that when he's served dinner. But there need be no hurry. I shall be busy for the next half-hour."

Captain Kettle wished to give a message to his crew, but he did not call them on deck, as he had a shrewd idea that such items would be noted from the shore and intelligently commented upon. Instead, he told his three mates and the boatswain, one by one, to go to the chart-house; and when they were all assembled, joined them there and gave his orders in a few words.

"I may be wrong, but I expect those fellows will try to get aboard here to-night. Now there'll be no moon, and with this heat-haze about, no light from the stars. The night'll be as black as the inside of a heathen, and I'm not going to let our amateurs play round with those rifles. They'd be just as likely to shoot some one on board here as Moors over the side; and when they'd shot their magazines empty, they'd be whanging in with the butt and smashing good rifles which will perhaps be of use later on. Bo's'n, I believe there's a keg of spare iron belaying-pins in your locker?"

"There is, sir."

"Then you will deal out one belaying-pin to every man on board, and if the hands are wanted, you mates, and you, Mr. McTodd, will see that they are strung out at reasonable intervals round the rail. I guess an iron belaying-pin, well driven, will cave in even a black skull. That will do."

They filed out silently and went below to prepare for the anticipated attack.

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NIGHT fell as it falls in the tropics, as though the sun had been shut into a box, and by her captain's orders all lit portholes and skylights on the little steamer were carefully shrouded. With the scheme of his maneuver clear in his mind, Captain Kettle in the hour preceding dark had already run his noisy steam-winches and derricks for the handling of imaginary cargo, so that if the sound traveled to the shore, the listeners there should get accustomed to it. As a consequence, when the windlass which was worked by a messenger chain from the forward winch did start heaving up, the only impression conveyed to the beach would be that the uneasy N'zaranees were again shifting cargo. And then when his anchor was once a-trip, and with engines just turning at dead slow ahead, and binnacle-light carefully shrouded, Kettle moved the *Wongaroo* half a mile farther north and again dropped anchor and held there to a short cable.

From the saloon below there drifted up the chatter of voices and whiffs of laughter. Captain Kettle bit his lips with vexation. He knew well enough how sound travels across water, and it looked as if his ruse of shifting anchorage would be wasted. But it crossed his mind that in a moment of enthusiasm Sir George Chesterman, M.P., had offered to serve under him—and obey orders—in any capacity he cared to name. What if he were to go below and ask for silence?

With ordinary passengers he would have done it in a moment, yes, have ordered it, and one can imagine that under the circumstances his manner would have been, to say the least of it, brusk. But under existing circumstances the whole theory of his sea upbringing rose in arms at the idea. An owner was an owner all the seas over. Captains existed merely for owners' profit and pleasure. And so he stayed on deck and did his best.

A voice and a whiff of whisky came to him out of the dark.

"Captain?"

"Yes, Mr. McTodd."

"Aboot yon black fellow the stewardess kenned. For why did he ask if I could do him a bit job ashore, and offer me a fi' pound note on account?"

"I don't know. But naturally you told him you were engaged here, and he could put his money where the monkey put the nuts."

"Man," said McTodd solemnly, "you'd never guess it of me, but I'll tell ye in confidence that I come from the Norrth, and up there it's said to be unlucky if you refuse siller if it's as good as offered ye. So I—I angled him, and I landed the note. I changed it with the steward to make sure it was a good one."

"And bought a bottle of ship's whisky with part of the change."

"Well, I couldn't ask the steward to do a delicate bit of financial business like yon without giving him a profit on the turnover. At least that's no' the custom where I come from. Mon, meanness such as that's a thing you'd never find in a Scot."

"Get on. You drank half the whisky, and what then?"

"Now, Captain, see here. I will no' be spied on. Tell me in a worrd, who's your informant aboot the whisky?"

Kettle turned on him savagely. "If you've come here on business, let me hear what it is without further maundering. If you've nothing useful to say, get down off my bridge. If you waste any more of my time, I'll kick you to the deck and then send you to your room, you—you dissolute mechanic!"

"And if I think myself too useful on deck to be incar—I should say in-car-cerated, what then?"

"Then, by James, if you can't remember you're an officer now, and you won't go peacefully when you're ordered, I'll have you frog's-marched there by the watch, and put in irons! I'm captain aboard here, and you've got to know it!"

"The vara worrds Miss Dubbs said to me when I telled her she could twiddle ye round her little finger if she felt that way inclined. And pagh! she seemed to think that because ye held a master's certificate ye'd be unapproachable. I telled her that men with master's tickets could be bought at threepence a dozen near the docks in any seaport town, but she preferred her own way of it. It's curious, come to think of it, why she should care for you."

"I'll trouble you not to couple Miss Dubbs' name with mine."

"But, man, you're engaged to her."

"I was. But she found reason to dislike me, and very wisely broke it off."

"Weel, I'm no questioning her wisdom. She's a capable buddy. She sewed a button on ma uniform coat as neat as I could have

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done it myself. And you say she's no' engaged at the moment? Gosh! I'll spark the lassie masel'!"

Captain Kettle's fingers twitched.

"If you'll no' be wanting that brillantine you used for your hair, I'd be glad of the loan of it."

"Get down off this bridge!"

"I'm going to back in the arrums of beauty——"

Captain Kettle's hand shot out and caught the engineer's collar before he had descended three steps of the steep bridge ladder, and jerked him suddenly backward and deposited him sitting on the decks of the upper bridge.

"Stop it!" he said in a sharp whisper. "And sober up, and look there!"

He stretched out an arm into the night and pointed to the south and east. The black velvet darkness was flawed by a flicker of infinitesimal flames.

"Phosphorescence," said McTodd. "The outer splashes of light'll be oars. Gosh, but she's a big craft, yon! She'll have a dozen oars a side. She'll be one of those big *kherbs*."

"A lighter."

"The Moorish word's *kherb*, as ye'd know if ye'd my education. I don't see for why ye're surprised. It's the natural sequence of events that the other blackguards should come off to join their chief who's tucked his way in among us so cannily. I should say that the throat-cutting will begin within five seconds of their coming over the side."

"That's my idea of it, and I've made my preparations accordingly. The mates know, and the deckhands are standing by. But I've another surprise packet for them first. What steam have you?"

"Enough maybe to just turn her over with."

"I told that old fool of a chief to keep steam for full speed all night. By James, I'll surely log that man for incompetence!"

"You should have given your order through me, and I would have seen it carried out. The chief's verra cannie on coal, and in private I may tell ye I suspect him of being an Aberdonian. But I'll away below and get a boost on those gages."

The oasis of phosphorescence crawled slowly across the black desert of the night, and presently a second flickering oasis disclosed itself, and then a third, and a fourth.

"Four big lighters crammed with men, and all of them of the true fighting trade," mused Captain Kettle. "If they're the ordinary cargo-*kherb* of the northwest coast they'll carry a hundred and twenty hands apiece in smooth water like this lagoon. That means four to five hundred enthusiasts coming to call, and all carrying cutlery. Well, if they go direct to my old anchorage I'm free to own they'll get a surprise."

Silence and secrecy was the order of the night. Mr. Trethewy the mate received orders and departed swiftly to the forecastle head. The carpenter was dropped into the cable-locker and battened down there so that the noise of his knocking out a shackle should not make itself heard. Then the heavy cable was muffled in every way possible and dropped through the hawse-hole, link by link, and finally let go with a rope and buoy to mark it. Phosphorescence, now that they were looking for it, showed them the line of the cable right down to the lagoon's floor, and to the men on board seemed an open advertisement of their position; but no trace of this reached the *kherbs*, and they plodded steadily along their course to the *Wongaroo's* old anchorage. Steam meanwhile was beginning to pour quietly through the escape-pipe, and Captain Kettle nodded appreciatively to himself as he took the temperature from time to time outside of the funnel casing.

TO BE CONTINUED

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Where Glory Beckons

By Peter B. Kyne

HE WAS a big man, blond and handsome and distinguished looking, with a mustache that curled at the ends, as if frightened. He was a "Hoch der Kaiser" sort of man. He came to E Company of the 12th Infantry from nowhere. He left E Company of the 12th infantry for—nowhere. Therein lies the story.

Speaking of him figuratively, the men voted him a prince. As a matter of strict fact, he was a count—a broken, exiled, German count, though long before this fact developed in E Company, his courtly, dignified manner, coupled with his distinguished appearance, had earned him the title. A soldier of fortune he was and he looked the part. His name, at least such part of it as he chose to divulge, was Hohenstein—Henri von Voldic Hohenstein, and he signed his name thus on the company pay-rolls.

Private Hohenstein would converse intelligently and fascinatingly on any subject, with one exception. He never referred to himself. He was a good soldier. He drank a little around pay-day, but not more than the ordinary white man, and beer had no effect on him. He was courteous, affable and kind-hearted. Hence, he was liked and respected. Very early in his enlistment he made the acquaintance of Private "Chippie" Marlowe, and there sprang up between them a friendship such as can exist only between men who eat and starve, drink and thirst, sleep and wake, fight and suffer side by side.

During the early days of the Philippine Rebellion there occurred frequent vacancies among the non-commissioned berths in all regiments on active service. The Count won a corporalship for conspicuous gallantry in action. He would have been made a sergeant, but something happened up in the little village of San Francisco de Malabon.

To be quite concise, the Count got drunk. *Beno* is a peculiar brand of bottled depravity, and no white man can dally with this liquid hell and still retain his self-respect. The Count lost his entirely. Perhaps if things hadn't been so quiet in San Francisco de Malabon the Count would never have touched it. There was a lull in the fighting; no hikes, no outpost shooting—nothing to make the blood jump or create a thrill.

Slowly but surely, in the hot, lazy days that followed the occupation of San Francisco de Malabon, the deadly native liquor wrought its spell on Hohenstein. Two months after his first lapse he was a hopeless *beno* fiend. A man disintegrates very quickly in the tropics, and *beno* is very potent.

Hohenstein never gulped his liquor like most *beno* fiends. He sipped it quietly and unostentatiously, between the puffs of his 'dobe cigarette, and grew drunk slowly, like a gentleman. When drunk he was neither boisterous nor unruly. When very drunk, he was melancholy and dreamy-eyed—and dangerous! It was then, as E Company learned, that Hohenstein forgot that he was a corporal in the United States army. He became again Count Henri of Hohenstein. He wept over his lost Hussars, his magnificent men, swept away in the chaos of the long ago.

Once, when the hot liquor had thoroughly stupefied his sense of shame, he told the story of his degradation in the German army, though that is neither here nor there. There was not wanting evidence to show that the Count had been somebody. Bit by bit the story of his life drifted into E Company. A Cockney in B Company, an ex-corporal from the Natal Carbineers, had fought with the Count in South Africa. "Rat" Hosmer had a friend in the 7th Cavalry who had served with the Count through three

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revolutions in Central America. McTaggart, the first sergeant, said he knew a Chino down in the Quiapo district, and this Chino, so McTaggart averred, recognized in the Count an erstwhile captain of the Chinese Imperial Guard.

E Company felt sorry for the Count. Big McTaggart condoned his frequent lapses from sobriety, and begged off for him when a summary court-martial threatened, and because they had tacked the rags on him for bravery they wouldn't take them off. Chippie Marlowe, the Count's bunkie, pleaded with him to get a grip on himself and brace up. It was really too bad, for the Count was a man among men, provided the lines were not drawn too closely

"He's bought a through ticket," Marlowe informed his squad, "and there isn't any return coupon attached. He's made a hash of it and he doesn't care any more. He's dropped from high places and he can't climb back. Some night he'll lie out in the grass, drunk, and perhaps it'll rain on him and he'll have fever. Ah, well! It'll be a good job. Poor old Henri. It isn't his luck to be plugged in action."

The squad nodded lazy assent to Chippie's philosophy, as it usually did. Chippie Marlowe was a Harvard man and his opinions went for something. He too, knew something of vain regret for a dead past, and the morning that Hohenstein failed to answer reveille, Chippie lead the searching party. They found tracks in the soft earth leading out beyond the outposts. They were crazy, straggling footprints.

Chippie looked out across the sodden rice-fields to where the tangle of green bamboo stretched away into Batangas province.

"He's out there," said Chippie, "drunk and delirious. Crazy with *beno*. Some one of those recruits slept on post last night or he'd have never gotten through the lines. Trying to run away from something, poor devil, and the *amigos* will get him now. It's dollars to doughnuts they have him already, and you know what that means. The Count will never see E Company again."

He never did.

For two weeks there were occasional speculations as to the details of the Count's demise. Had he been boloed or bayoneted or backed up against a wall? Some there were who loved the Count and prayed that he had met the issue while still drunk. Then the 12th took the field again. Men died, or were discharged or invalided home, and recruits took their places. It was a lively campaign and in the stirring scenes that were enacted there was but one man who missed the dashing presence of Count Henri of Hohenstein. Sometimes, in the blue blackness of the tropic night, when the big warm drops beat on the walls of the little dog-tent which they had occupied together, Chippie Marlowe thought of the Count and prayed that, dead or alive, all was well with him.

II

AWAY down in the south Camarines there was (for it no longer exists) a little Tagal *barrio* called Tabuyos. It was not even a fair-sized *barrio*. One street, half a block long, with possibly a dozen wretched *nipa* shacks perched in disorderly array on each side of the street, constituted the *barrio* of Tabuyos on a morning in November, 1905, when twelve troopers from the 14th Cavalry rode out of the mahogany forest into the village.

It was a detail scouting for *ladrones*. A sergeant commanded, a tall fellow, thin in the flanks and wearing in his face the leathery tan that comes of torrid days and sleepless nights. As they trotted carelessly through the little village the sergeant spoke to his corporal.

"Why, this *barrio* is deserted!" he said. "Not even a *viejo hombre* in sight. I wonder what's the matter? It can't be that we've scared them away, Rat. We're the first troops to strike this part of Luzon. Over in Barcelona they told me that even the Spaniards never got up this far."

The corporal rose in his stirrups and looked over into a back yard.

"Quiet as a graveyard," he answered. "Looks suspicious, Chippie, unless they've had a plague here. Let's investigate."

The sergeant reined in his horse.

"Take the detachment down to that little creek. We can rest up there a while and water the stock. In the meantime I'll poke through this *barrio* and see what's doing. If there's been disease here, there's no use exposing all of the men to it. You'll hear me shooting if I need you."

"Provided you have time," the corporal answered lightly. "Don't pick up a nail," he added, as he rode away. "There may be forty *ladrones* in this *wickiup*."

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The sergeant was dismounting. "I'd feel sorry for them," he replied with the indifferent air of a man who knows his business and has learned to pin his faith in his trigger finger.

With the instinct of his profession the sergeant drew his carbine from the scabbard and slipped a clip of cartridges into the magazine. His horse followed him as he strode cautiously through the street, peering into yards and open windows. Suddenly he paused, rigid, and his carbine flew to "Ready."

In a shack not ten feet away a man was speaking in low guttural Tagalog. The voice rose querulously, complainingly, and the sergeant lowered his carbine. Some sixth sense told him he would not use it. The voice of a Tagal woman, shrill but vibrating with infinite tenderness, answered the complaining male voice, which died away in a long-drawn sigh, expressive of the deepest despair. For perhaps a minute, while the sergeant stood gazing at the shack, there was not a sound. Then again the complaining voice—this time in English—with a German accent.

"It's a lie!" wailed the voice. "They're cavalry! I heard them go by. Don't I know? She don't want them to find me. She's keeping them away from me. She don't understand——"

Under the stress of his emotion, the speaker reverted to the speech of the Fatherland. The sergeant did not understand German. He waited until the voice again resumed in English.

"No dream," it muttered; "I know the sounds too well. Those hoof-beats—the horses were shod—and I thought I heard the tinkle of a saber. There it is again"—as the sergeant's horse pawed the earth impatiently—"a sweating, hard-ridden horse. I smell him!" he shrieked. "Comrades, come to me! Come to me or I perish! Ah, my beautiful men, my incomparable Hussars, you will save me—save me! Dear God, let me die with white men! Let me——"

The voice died away in mutterings of mingled German, Spanish, Tagalog and English. Presently it started to sing—a cracked and feeble baritone, struggling bravely through "*Die Wacht Am Rhein.*" The sergeant waited until the voice broke and ceased. Then he spoke.

"Who's there?" he challenged.

There was a silence of perhaps ten seconds

"Who's there?" the sergeant repeated. "A friend!"

The answer, scarcely more than a hoarse whisper, came with military promptness in the old familiar formula. The sergeant stepped into the yard, climbed the creaking bamboo steps and entered the *nipa* shack.

It was a gruesome sight upon which he gazed. The shack was indescribably filthy, and, like all Filipino shacks, devoid of furniture of any kind. In one corner, upon a bed of foul, ill-smelling Spanish artillery blankets, taken in some forgotten foray, lay a Thing. At its side crouched a native woman, young, but with a pathetic look of age and hopelessness. She was pitifully ugly, even for a Filipino woman, and as she squatted there on her heels, chewing betel-nut, with her bony arms clasped around her naked knees, she looked to the sergeant for all the world like a sick ape.

The Thing beside her had once been a man. As the sergeant stooped to peer at him more closely, the woman screamed and clasped the emaciated Thing in her arms, as if she feared that the sergeant might take it away. The creature reached out a weird claw from the tangle of rags and tenderly stroked the greasy, matted head, the while reassuring her in Tagalog.

"Hello there, old-timer," said the sergeant kindly. "Who the devil are you and what's up?"

The man turned a face toward the speaker. The trooper drew back and the friendly smile faded from his face.

It was hardly a human countenance into which the sergeant gazed. It was merely the front of a human head. The sunken sockets held two sightless eyes and the forehead was horribly pitted and scarred with smallpox. A tangle of blond beard covered his face and dropped almost to his waist.

The sergeant sickened at the dreadful apparition! The man spoke:

"I am Count Henri of Hohenstein, in Saxony. I was a captain once. I commanded a troop in a Hussar regiment. I had a decoration, too—the Iron Cross. The Emperor gave it me at Gravelotte. But later they took it away. They said I was unworthy——"

The sergeant was on his knees, both hands grasping the scrawny, mangled hand that Henri of Hohenstein held out to him.

"I'm Marlowe, Count—Chippie Marlowe. Don't you remember, old man? I

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soldiered with you in E of the 12th. You remember, don't you, Count? It was a dough-boy regiment and we lost you at San Francisco de Malabon in April, '99. Chippie Marlowe, that's the name. You remember they called me Chippie because I could whistle."

THE trooper squatted on his heels, native fashion, pursed his lips and a flute-like melody filled the sordid room. The Count raised his wreck of a hand and softly beat time to the opening strains of the overture from Tannhauser. Two big tears started in the corners of his sightless eyes and rolled across his scarred cheeks, but they were tears of joy.

"I remember," he said softly; "they called you the Mocking Bird. Whistle for me, dear friend, that song from 'Faust.'"

Chippie's high notes faltered a little as he swung into the old familiar air:

"But when glory to danger shall call me,
I still shall be first, shall be first in the fray
As blithe as a knight in his bridal array,
As a knight——"

Aye, glory, indeed! It had called him and it had called the Count, and there, in that sordid shack he trilled of a knight in his bridal array! Oh, the irony of it, with the Count sitting there, very erect, his sightless eyes turned toward this white man who came to him out of the silence of the lost years! His thin arms were outstretched, his mangled hands quivered, his great bony breast rose and fell under the soiled *pina camisa*, worn native-fashion outside the linen trousers. The sergeant gulped and ceased his warbling. The Count spoke:

"Is it you, dear friend, or have I at last gone mad?"

The Mocking Bird's eyes were wet with unshed tears.

"You poor, poor devil!" he said, and again he took Count Henri's hand in both of his.

"Is it you, old comrade of other days?"

"It's Chippie, Count. Same old Mocking Bird, only I'm not in the old outfit any more. I'm in the cavalry. —— you!"

This to the Tagal woman who fell upon him like a tigress, beating him with her hands, biting at him, screaming like a lost soul. The sergeant struck her with his open hand and hurled her into the far corner of the room, where she crouched, shuddering and sobbing, the personification of wretchedness.

The Count's hand swept up over Chippie's face and head, felt of the yellow tassels on his campaign hat and rested at length on the chevrons on his arms.

"A sergeant of cavalry," he mused. "You have risen, Marlowe, I see. *Ach, Gott!* To feel a horse between these knees once more before I die! I was too heavy for your American cavalry. And yet I was once a captain of Hussars," he added proudly.

To Chippie Marlowe, kneeling there beside the lost corporal, the horror of the scarred face and broken hands brought no feelings of revulsion. Innately gentle, the sergeant had seen too much of life, too much of death, to offer maudlin sympathy; he was too practical to waste a moment's time in a stirring emergency.

"We had a saddle emptied yesterday," he said. "An affair with some of Ramon's men. Pull yourself together, Count, old bunkie, and we'll have you on a horse and out of this hell-hole in jig time. Do you remember 'Rat' Hosmer? 'Rat's' my corporal. He's down by the creek now with the detachment. He'll be mighty glad to see you again. Come now, Count. Up you come. We'll take good care of you."

Henri of Hohenstein shook his shaggy head.

"Too late," he said. "I'll never go back!"

The sergeant rolled and lit a cigarette, and prepared to argue the question.

"Why?" he queried.

The tired lids drooped over the sightless eyes. A smile of infinite pathos fringed the scarred lips.

"I want to die," he replied gently.

Chippie Marlowe stared at the Count, but in his keen strong face there appeared no trace of surprise or opposition. In his heart of hearts he could not blame the Count. So he did not reply at once, and the Count, gaging the sergeant's silence correctly, with the keen intuition of the blind, resumed in his weary monotone:

"Yes, Marlowe, you are right. It is best so. I am a blind, broken, crippled man. I am too horrible for human eyes to gaze upon. It is not worth while to suffer longer. I have only lived because it has been impossible for me to die. But that condition exists no longer. I can die now—so easily!"

The long arm was stretched gropingly

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toward the trooper; the hand touched the cartridge-belt and followed it around until it rested on the sergeant's Colt's.

"Not much, Count! None of that. You're too much of a man to kill yourself."

The Count laughed. "Wrong, Marlowe, wrong. I'm not enough of a man to kill myself." He held up his mangled hands. "I could not if I would. Did you ever hear of Colonel Emilio Pilar, *amigo mio?*"

"He commanded a well-drilled bunch of insurrectos, didn't he? Up Bengat way?" The Count nodded. "Well, what about him? He's dead now. We cornered him, and he put up a lively row, but we shelled him out and killed him in a swamp."

"This is indeed the happiest day of my life!" said the Count. "Such music, such news! Glorious! And such a friend! Ah! Chippie, what joy you bring with you."

He thrust out his bare feet and the sergeant noted a great, jagged blue scar through each instep.

"Mauser bayonets," explained the Count composedly. "The dog crucified me. I'm glad he's dead! Spread-eagled me on four Mauser bayonets. Did he die hard, Chippie? Did you see him at the finish? If there is a hell, that half-breed will roast for all eternity. He thought to break my heart, to make me plead——"

"Oh, my God!" The sergeant's face puckered in horror. And "Oh, God!" he repeated over and over.

"Ah, yes," Count Henri continued, "Emilio was a droll villain. He would have his little joke. By the way, old fellow, is that not American tobacco you're smoking?"

The man was sniffing. He reminded the sergeant of a bird-dog.

"Because if it is," he added, with a return of his old-time *camaraderie*, "you must roll me a cigarette. There's no pleasure in the native leaf. Too flat, Chippie, too flat. Most unsatisfying."

THE MOCKING BIRD rolled a cigarette, thrust it between the Count's lips and lit it. The Count bowed his thanks. He strove to conceal, under a pitiful air of bravado, the emotion which had shaken him at this meeting with Chippie. And he was succeeding fairly well, too; rapidly drifting back over the lost years to the old, careless, reckless soldier of the line. He leaned back on his bed of rags and with an air of great contentment commenced blowing smoke-rings.

"I'd like to see Rat Hosmer," he said presently. "Dear little Rat. I owe him three pesos, borrowed, I believe, to purchase *beno*. And so he's your corporal. I would like to have you send for him that I might shake his honest hand. But it is best thus. I am already in his debt. When I am gone you can tell him. I beg you, Marlowe, convey to him my profound regard."

"Buck up, Count," the trooper answered. "You're not going to die. You're carried on the records as a deserter, but that can be fixed up all right. They'll try you for absence without leave, as a mere matter of form. You have over two years' back pay coming to you, a pension for total disability and a comfortable bed in the Old Soldiers' Home. When my service is in I'll come and join you—provided, of course."

Count Henri of Hohenstein blew a smoke-ring. "I die to-day," he said. "This very morning. And you, dear friend—you will oblige me, will you not? You were always kind—always a gentleman. And in return for this, to you, unpleasant service, and another of your priceless cigarettes, I will tell you a story."

"Do you mean——"

"Precisely, *mein Freund*, precisely. My hands are useless since Pilar's little joke. I fear I should make a bungling job of it, and the first duty of a soldier is neatness. I am helpless. Dear Chippie, you will not deny me, I know!"

"But—but—it'll be murder!" gasped the sergeant. "It isn't up to me to take a human life!"

"That, my dear fellow," retorted the Count, "is hypercritical, orthodox rot. I tell you it will be common charity. Do you remember that day on the Gondera, when the bolomen rushed us and cut us off from most of our guns? There was a man named Flaherty shot through the hips and we carried him with us when we fell back. And the *amigos* followed us, pecking away, until we knew that we must abandon Flaherty or die with him. We decided to die with him. Flaherty knew. He understood. And when we made our last stand, he asked for a Colt's and it was given him. He blew his own brains out—in common charity. He was a man! He was more than a man. He

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was a philosopher. He had lived to learn that the mystery of death is no greater than the mystery of birth. I am not morbid, Chippie. I'm suffering and I'm tired of it. That's all. Is the cavalry pistol still a .38?"

"Yes," replied the sergeant huskily, "no change. But the Krag has been retired. We use a Springfield of smaller caliber."

The trooper was anxious to change the topic of conversation.

"The Krag was a great piece," was the comment of the ex-corporal. "But there'll be use for them. There'll always be trouble in the banana republics. I landed thirty thousand Mannlichers in the Argentine once, but somebody peached. What regiment are you in now, Chippie?"

"B Troop, of the 14th Cavalry."

"The 14th? Why, that's a new regiment. They had but ten cavalry regiments when I left the service."

"It's an old regiment now. The Army has been reorganized and you've been gone six years."

"Nearer sixty!" responded the Count. "Where's E of the 12th?"

"Went home five years ago. In Cuba now, I think. How long have you been here?"

"I don't know. I lost track of time after the first year—a long, long time. Pilar had me for eleven months, and we have lived in this shack practically ever since. There were formerly about a dozen natives living here—neighbors, you know. They have gone away. We have been alone for a long time now. I haven't seen—I mean I haven't heard or spoken to any one but the woman there in a great many months. There is some trouble. Occasionally, when I am sober, as you fortunately find me to-day, I crawl out and sit in the sunlight.

"I have taken to *beno* again during the last two months, since the baby died—yes, we had a baby—a little boy. Ah, Marlowe, you have never been a father, you who have eyes to see a son! I—never—saw—mine! Already he could speak a little German. *Ach, mein kleines Männschen?* What a comfort he was to me! Dear friend, in all this world, no human being has suffered as I have suffered. And yet, at night, when the baby arms went around my neck, my heart filled up with love for him. *Donnerwetter!* I was happy! When his mother could no longer nurse him and he lay beside me, hungry; when the mosquitoes fed on his tender body, think you, friend Marlowe, he whimpered? *Ach Gott!* No! He was my son. My—boy! My—little—man!"

HENRI OF HOHENSTEIN bowed his leonine head in his scarred hands. His great, gaunt frame was convulsed with sobs that could not find an outlet through his clenched teeth. Silence, save for the frantic rustling of a lizard in the *nipa* thatch. In the corner the Tagal woman still crouched, her great, hollow, black eyes still fixed on the Count.

As the sergeant glanced at her he was aware, for the first time, of her extreme emaciation. She was a veritable skeleton. Six years of foreign service had sharpened the sergeant's naturally keen sense of observation, and he knew that the woman was in the last throes of starvation. But that was not all. There was something—something which in the semi-darkness of the shack the sergeant had not noticed before—*something*——

Sergeant Marlowe ripped out a deep soldier oath and his ready hand flew to his Colt's. It came into his mind very suddenly to obliterate this ghastly spectacle, to end swiftly—now—the tragedy in those sunken eyes; mercifully to remove this unclean survivor of what Chippie Marlowe now knew to be a leper village!

So this was the answer to the riddle of the empty shacks, of the deserted *barrio*; of the Tagal "neighbors" who had crossed the Styx, leaving this poor, unclean wretch to keep her vigil of love beside Henri of Hohenstein until that day when white men should ride into Tabuyos, with their strange ways—their strange manner of loving and hating—to reclaim this creature that belonged to them.

But did he belong to them? And belonging to them, did they care to claim him? The sergeant leaned forward and glanced sharply into the Count's face. It could not be possible that he had escaped it, with those dreadful wounds on his hands and feet so open to contagion. But nothing marred the deathly white of the skin on the Count's ears and forehead. There was no sign, and with a deep intake of breath Chippie recollected that it takes seven years for the germ to manifest its presence. *The Count had a year to go!*

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III

THE Tagal woman crept back to the Count's side, took his matted head in her gaunt lap and soothed him as a mother soothes a fretful child. The sergeant drew away from her. Her tenderness surprised him, for Tagal women are not usually demonstrative in their love.

But the Count was game. Presently he raised his great head and stifled his emotion.

"I promised you a story, comrade. I must to the recital, for time presses and marching orders have come at last. You remember up there in the country around Bacoor Bay? It was so dull, so deadly quiet, nothing to do, no fighting, nothing to make a man forget. I took to *beno*. Why I left the lines that night I do not know. I was drunk and I awoke in the bush. I was sober then, sober enough to realize that I was alone in that big stretch of bamboo between Bacoor and San Francisco de Malabon, and ignorant of the position of our troops. I was so foolish! I shouted, and Pilar's men scooped me in.

"I had my bayonet, and I might have fought, but there were too many. Besides, I didn't really care. I thought it only meant a firing-squad in the end and a queer humor possessed me to see the thing to a finish. When they stood me up before the firing-squad I would curse them and show them how to die. Life has never meant much for me, Marlowe. My soul was damned long before Pilar's men took me in. I prefer a bullet, however. I have always had a horror of a knife. Still, if I had known what was before me I would have forced the issue with the bayonet and made them kill me.

"I have never known why they did not execute me. For eleven months they marched me with them over Luzon. They starved me and beat me. For days I lived on a handful of rice and the tender shoots from the roots of the bamboo. Once a Tagal priest gave me some carabao meat—scraps from his own table. And I—God forgive me, I ate it! I, Count Henri of Hohenstein in Saxony, to whom the Emperor gave the Iron Cross. I had sunk that low. They made a slave of me and harnessed me to a plow with other prisoners. They worked me in the fields like a carabao. When I dropped in the furrow they prodded me with the bayonet and forced me to keep on. When I turned and fought, hoping they would kill me, they drew back and grinned. *Por qué?* Because I fought always and they could not conquer me.

"In one village—Niac—we stayed three months. Then one morning I heard the blessed sound of Krags, volley firing, and the bullets ripped through our stockade. Ah, Marlowe, what a merry song they sang! It was in the rainy season, and the attack came at daylight. I can see them yet, a regular regiment charging through the rain and mist across those fields where I had toiled like an animal. I shrieked and beat on the bamboo stockade, thinking deliverance was at hand. Alas! The devils lead me out before the Americans swept through the streets of Niac, and, herded with a wretched, nerveless, weeping pack of Spanish conscripts, prisoners of war all of them, some taken away back in '96, we fled from Niac.

"I marched barefoot and the rain beat on my nakedness. Each day eclipsed its predecessor in the horrors that I suffered. Always, always, a running fight, with the open country in front and those bulldog Americans behind. The Spaniards, poor fools, thought it was their army! They never knew there had been a war with the United States.

"Twice I saw the 12th—the old regiment—charging as my captors fled with me before their steel. Men were killed around me, but no friendly bullet sought me out. I was covered with sores and cuts and bruises and at night the mosquitoes fed on me. I suffered!

"When a Spaniard fell, they let him lie there. Sometimes they used a bayonet. When I fell, they carried me. They wanted to break my spirit. But still I could not die, and I would not let them see I suffered. I am not of peasant blood, Marlowe, and I could not bow my head and ask the dogs for mercy.

"Occasionally we were joined by other recruits to the Army of the Lost. Once, in a village called Legaspi, there were seven of us, and we strangled the sentry and broke out of the stockade. Again Fate dealt me an unkind hand. Six were killed before they even reached the bamboo. I wandered in the bush for twelve days, living on roots and grasses and tree lizards. I lost all sense of direction, and on the thirteenth day I staggered out of the bush up into Legaspi! They welcomed me back with cheers and

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laughter. With mock festivity the band formed in column of twos and escorted me up the street to the stockade. I walked inside and cursed them through the gate.

"A jackass battery shelled us out of Legaspi and we moved on to Ligao. Here I met a poor devil, a trumpeter from the Third Artillery. He had been taken but a week before and was still fresh and strong. But he was young and hot-blooded and he could not bide his time. He strangled a sentry that spat upon him. They buried the bugler boy next day—buried him *alive* in the plaza with his head sticking up out of the grave! Poor boy! He had known so little of this cold world. He took it too hard. All day he raved in the sun while the women and children tortured him and spat in his maddened face.

"It was there that I earned the particular attention of Emilio Pilar. Pilar commanded the insurrectos in Ligao. He was half Spanish by a Moro mother, and suckled murder at his mother's breast. It was this spawn of hell that would break my spirit. At his order, a sentry lead me out from the stockade, that I might see a white man suffer. I looked into that boyish face, with the hot tears streaking the pale cheeks. Pilar stood by and smiled. I went to the bugler and knelt by his side and patted his head.

"'Courage, comrade, courage! The tears do but delight this mongrel hound. He would break the heart of a brave man, but even in death you triumph!'

"Thus I spoke to the buried man. He choked down the sobs and with my bare hand I dried the tears from those eyes that looked up at me, pleading for death. *Ach, Gott!* How well I knew! But I would have him die as befits a white man and a soldier.

"SUDDENLY the sentry walked over toward us. He wore a grin on his brown face and I knew he contemplated one more outrageous insult to the buried man. The thought enraged me. I became a fiend, a madman. I sprang upon the sentry. I twisted the Mauser from his puny hands and with the butt crushed in his skull. Before I could parry, Emilio Pilar was upon me. He cut at me with is bolo and the steel bit to the bone in my right shoulder. Before he could strike again I closed with him, and threw him heavily. In my frenzy and the pleasure of killing him slowly, I forgot the guard. They swarmed over me like little mangy curs. *Donnerwetter!* Such a fight it was! But in the end—you understand, Marlowe. There were too many.

"I never saw the artillery bugler again. For aught I know his bleached skull still peeps out of the grave in the plaza. But of one thing I feel certain. He died like a man.

"That afternoon the women and children stoned me through the streets of Ligao. The *hombres* looked on and smoked cigarettes and smiled. I fell in the street unconscious and they tired of the sport, but Pilar had them drench me with water and I came to.

"Late in the afternoon, with his own devilish hands, Pilar crucified me. Pegged me out on a big bamboo cross close to a pool of green water, and there were mosquitoes there and hungry black ants. The night came down and they left me there to die, and I cursed God who had deserted me and would not let me die.

"Then the woman came. In the darkness she came to me, as in the darkness I shall leave her. She pried me loose, bound up my hands and feet and tied me on the back of a carabao. All night we traveled. I was unconscious most of the journey. Just before dawn she carried me into a *nipa* shack and laid me on the floor. She gave me to drink of carabao milk and *beno* and I became unconscious.

"How long I lay there, a raving, battered semblance of a man, I know not. She must have doctored me well, for my terrible wounds eventually healed. Months later, when I became rational, I was blind—confluent smallpox, I guess.

"But the woman never left me. She nursed me and fed me and bathed me in sweet herbs. At night she sat and fanned away the mosquitoes while I slept. And for what, comrade? For a kind word, for a smile, for a careless caress from a being as horrible as I! Strange, Marlowe, but I have never seen her, and she has borne me a child. She came to me in the night and when I awoke I was blind. But I know she must be beautiful. A soul such as hers could not inhabit a form like those of the hags that stoned me through Ligao. Tell me, dear friend, is she beautiful?"

"No, Count," lied Chippie slowly, "she's not beautiful. But she's a big, handsome woman. Very noble bearing. And she-

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isn't a pure strain Tagal by any means. Looks to be a little better than a mestizo—about three-quarters white, I should say."

"Black or white, I love her, Marlowe. I never thought I should love a woman I have never seen—particularly a Tagal woman. But she has made this sordid room a home. She has kissed away my suffering and I—how have I rewarded her? She saw me kill the sentry in Ligao, and she saw them stone me through the streets. Because others hated me, she loved me. My helpless state aroused her pity. Because I was defenseless she protected me.

"For me, she has left her people to be an exile in this silent village. In return for this, I have given nothing. I have eaten while she has cheerfully starved, and when in my cups, I have too often, I fear, struck her. But I married her before the child was born. A *dungaree* priest came over from Barcelona. I couldn't bear to think that the boy might meet white men some day and be ashamed of his father.

"Comrade, it is well for a man to have lived and suffered. I, who have been an animal, know. I have lived an eternity. I would have ended it, but I had no weapon and I was blind. I tried starvation, but the woman begged and pleaded and I could not hurt her. I think we have had some disease here—cholera, perhaps. It has cleaned out the village. No one comes near us and—well, food has been somewhat scarce of late. She goes out after food and often comes back in tears. I do not understand."

The Mocking Bird did. As he smoked, he looked out the window toward the blue mountains in the distance, and in fancy he saw a leper woman stoned from the rice and corn-fields; saw an outcast creep up to a broken man, writhing on a cross. Once, in the long ago, before the magic of the drums had claimed him, Chippie Marlowe had been something more than a sergeant of cavalry. And he had known love, too, but not—not such love as this. Otherwise he would not have been a sergeant of cavalry.

SO POOR, gaunt, starving, loveless wretch! Ah, well, even a Tagal woman may have a soul; even a leper woman may love; and as the trooper gazed into her luminous dark eyes, alight with the glint of starvation, he forgot that she was unclean and remembered only that he had struck her. He drew off his gauntlet, reached over and with brotherly tenderness stroked her wan cheek with his bare hand. The woman looked up and the big tears glistened in her eyes. She was content, for at last she was understood. She had lived to be appreciated.

The Count's weary voice interrupted.

"I was asleep when your troop trotted through the *calle*. I heard the hoof-beats, the jingle of sabers and the creak of the saddles, but before I was thoroughly awake you had passed through. I thought I did but dream, as I have so often dreamed through all these bitter years. Ah, Chippie, how I have prayed for a comrade to open the door and lead me out of bondage. When I am gone this poor woman will go back to her people. She loves me, but they are not a sentimental race. She will forget."

"But she has white blood in her," the sergeant lied desperately, "and blood will tell. You must get this idea out of your head, Count. It isn't playing fair to her. She's not a Tagal. She'll feel it."

"I heard you say that before," the Count retorted grimly, "and I thank you for it. It is a kind lie. But I will send her away, ostensibly for *beno*. She will be gone an hour. One more cigarette and then to business. Will you oblige me?"

The Mocking Bird looked at his ex-bunkie and thought of those hands and feet, tended by a leper woman. It was not possible that the Count could escape.

"I'll do it," he said presently. "I guess you'll be happier after all. You'd do as much for me, wouldn't you, old man?"

"I would, indeed. Thank you, dear friend. You are so good, so kind, and I am so unworthy of your charity!"

The sergeant blinked away a tear, the first that had dimmed his stern eyes in many a long year. The Count turned to the Tagal woman and spoke a few words to her. She kissed him tenderly and left the shack.

The Count lay back on his blankets and smoked and talked with the sergeant of the world he had lost and would never know again. He recalled almost forgotten incidents, laughed heartily as the sergeant recited some rude anecdote of the service, refought his battles, talked of old comrades, and asked innumerable questions anent world politics.

Presently he threw aside the butt of the cherished cigarette.

"She will be back within a few minutes

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now," he said calmly, "and your troop must be worrying and wondering what's delaying you. So let us to this unpleasant little task. Good-by, Chippie, *mi bien compañero.* At last I win! To-night I bivouac with the gods, though my dreadful body repose in the ashes of Tabuyos. When I am free, burn the shack."

"I'm —— if I do!" the trooper replied. "You shall be buried like a soldier and a gentleman. You shall have taps and the three volleys and Rat Hosmer shall say a prayer over you!"

The Count laughed softly, though his poor face lit up at the sergeant's words.

"I had forgotten," he said. "Rat was educated for the pulpit and ran away with a circus outfit. But I'd really like the volleys and taps and—yes, the prayers, too."

"Any message for—anybody?"

"No. Nobody cares."

The sergeant stepped to the door of the shack, for he was minded to fire a shot in the air as the quickest means of bringing the corporal to him with the detachment. The moment he appeared in the doorway, however, a Mauser cracked far up the hillside and a bullet tore through the *nipa* thatch. He dodged back into the hut, and an irregular volley echoed from hillside to hillside.

"I'll be back later," he shouted to the Count; "we're bushwhacked by those bloody *ladrones.*"

Bullets were ripping through the shack and it was dangerous for the soldier to remain. As he reached forward to shake the hand of Count Henri of Hohenstein, the lost one sighed, slid forward on his scarred face nor moved nor quivered once; for he was free! A friendly bullet had sought him out at last and his restless soul was out of bondage. The trooper closed the sightless eyes and fled from the hut.

IV

IT WAS a short, savage fight. The detachment fought on foot, and when the *ladrones*, confident of victory in the odds of fifty to fourteen, charged down into Tabuyos, Corporal Hosmer was amazed to discover that they were led by a woman, a frenzied, gaunt devil of a female. Though Corporal Hosmer did not know it, the woman was the Countess of Hohenstein, beating her dry breast and shrieking curses on the white men who had ridden into her Arcadia and destroyed the thing she loved.

They fought it out in the open, the troopers standing erect and firing rapidly and accurately, the *ladrones* striving to get to close quarters with the bolos, or shooting wildly from the hip. They charged, a savage brown wedge, lipped with steel, and like snow before the rising sun the wedge melted before ever it reached the little skirmish line at the end of the village street.

When it was all over, Sergeant Marlowe came out from behind the Hohenstein *casa*, whither he had led his horse, and leaned his smoking Springfield against a bamboo fence.

"Whew!" he said, and grinned at Rat Hosmer. "Any of the men hit, Rat? Thoughtful of you to fight on foot and swing your skirmish-line at right angles to protect the horses."

"Hello!" said Rat Hosmer. "We thought they'd got you. It was that —— woman. I saw her sneaking out of the village, up into the woods, and I smelled a rat and was waiting for it. She led the bunch against us, the crazy old witch. She was downed over there to the left. Brackett got her at eighty yards."

"I shall recommend Brackett for a corporalship," said the sergeant grimly.

THEY buried Count Henri von Voldic Hohenstein with all the rites of his profession. As for the Countess, being what she was, the corporal was for leaving her with her people, but the sergeant objected. She belonged to the Count, and she went to her long sleep by his side. When the volleys had been fired and the long, quavering notes of taps had gone sounding up through the mahogany forest, Rat Hosmer bowed his reckless head and recited the Lord's Prayer over Henri of Hohenstein. Then they mounted and rode away through the morning mist.

The sergeant lingered at the end of the little street and the detachment trotted on ahead. At the crest of the hill the corporal awaited him. Presently he saw a thin blue column of smoke rise straight into the still air, and a moment later he heard the crack, crack, crackle of burning bamboo.

Presently the sergeant joined him. They spoke no word, but side by side stretched away down through the valley and on toward the blue mountains, where Ramon's men waited, where glory beckoned and a man could forget.

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The Dispossessed Humorist

by

Lewis Hopkins Spilman

CAPTAIN JIM DUGIN, proprietor of the Dundee Trade Emporium sat in the shade of a pine-tree in the storehouse yard, asleep.

From where Captain Jim sat, by opening his eyes and pushing up the brim of his flapping panama hat, he might have seen a vision of loveliness in earth, sea and sky.

Beyond a line of tall palmettoes lay the placid waters of Indian River, Florida's most beautiful waterway. Overhead was a sky of deep unbroken blue, while out beyond the water—beyond the line of palmettoes, above the eastern horizon—was a line of purple, rusty, pink and unclassified colored clouds, the mark on high of that marine wonder, the Gulf Stream.

But none of this did Captain Jim see. Nor did he see the tall copper-colored Indian, slipping through the scrub palmetto along the narrow trail from the west, although the red man, with his bright-colored turban, loose-flowing shirt and bare, muscular legs, would have been an object of interest to artist or anthropologist.

Toeing in, the fine muscles playing in and out on his perfectly molded mahogany-colored legs, and with the characteristic soft step of the red man, the tall Indian rapidly approached until he stood over the sleeping paleface. He held a slat-covered wooden box, carried as though weighty.

"How!" he grunted, after standing motionless for some time.

The Captain's pipe dropped from his mouth, and he straightened up with a start.

"Why, hello, Tommy," he said as his vision cleared. "Where'd ye come from?"

The Indian stood silent and motionless. Knowing from long experience that he had the talking to do, and not waiting for an answer, the Captain continued,

"What you got in box, Tommy? Venison, fish, gopher, you want to sell?"

"*Chun-tee-chu-day*," said the Indian.

"Um! *Chuntechudy, chun-te-chudy*," said the Captain thoughtfully, wrinkling his brow and pulling at his thin wisp of whiskers. "I ought to know what that is; I've heard that word. Trouble is they ain't no two of these heathen that talk alike, and when I take the trouble to learn a word from one the next that comes along calls it different and I can't understand it."

"Is it a young one, Tommy?"

This question, asked as a feeler for identifying information, was received in silence.

Thereupon the Captain proceeded to straighten up in his chair to see what manner of fish, flesh or fowl a *chun-tee-chu-day* might be.

The Indian stood immovable while the Captain's long nose barely cleared the edge of the box as he leaned forward to bring his eyes into position to see without the exertion of rising, nor did he move when, after peering intently into the box, the Captain, with a frightened yell, threw himself back, upset the chair and fell full length on the sand!

BUD LEGGETT, the Captain's clerk, armed with the first weapon that came to hand, which happened to be a cheese-knife, dashed out of the store door on hearing the cry.

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"What's the matter?" he shouted, seeing his employer getting slowly to his feet and the big red man standing immovable as a bronze statue.

"Snake!" said the Captain, backing off. "Rattlesnake, big 'round as my leg and ten foot long! Gosh! I come pretty near puttin' my face right on it and it was hissin' and spittin' out its tongue plum sinful! Why'n't you tell me what was in there, Tommy, when you see me stickin' my face right down agi'n it that way? I might a got bit. Why d'n't ye tell me?" he added with some heat.

"*Chun-tee-chu-day*," said the unmoved red man.

"Yes, I know what it is now," said the Captain, leaning over to brush the sand out of his hair. "What you'd orter done was to tell me so I'd understand before. Why'n't you say snake? You know how to say snake well's I do, if you wanted to."

Turning away, the Captain mounted the steps and stalked into the store, while his clerk cautiously approached the box.

"Whoop-ee!" he ejaculated, "that *is* a snake! Why he fills that soap-box—hundred bars to the box. Bet it will weigh fifty pounds. What you going to do with it, Tommy?" And as the Indian made no reply, he repeated with slow emphasis: "What do with snake, Tommy?"

"You buy um," was the reply. "*She-larkin* dolla'. Heap cheap."

"Yes, I reckon that's cheap—four dollars for about a bushel of snake—but I ain't stuck on no such pets. No buy snake, Tom," he announced with decision.

"Cap'n buy um. *She-larkin* dolla', heap cheap," said the Indian, as Leggett turned to the steps.

"Better guess again, Tommy. I think the Captain has seen all he wants of that animal," was Leggett's reply.

"That snake-catchin' heathen gone?" inquired the Captain as Bud entered the store.

"Nope, says you will buy his snake. Wants four dollars for it," said Bud.

"Buy Thunder! I've a good mind to bust a board over his head," said the indignant merchant, nursing a bruised shoulder.

The Indian, box in hand, appeared at the door.

"You buy snake, Cap'n," he insisted. "*She-larkin* dolla'. Heap big. Heap cheap."

The Captain whirled around, scowling darkly, but before he could speak Leggett interposed.

"Look out, Captain. Don't rile Tommy; you loose all the Indian trade, if you do, and they buy right smart. You been buyin' live 'gators and all sorts of varmints from them for Bisbee, you know, and he 'lowed you'd be glad to get the snake."

"Well, I ain't," was the indignant reply. "I'd like a chance to kill it, though. What does he ask for it? What is '*she-larkin'?*"

"That's four—four dollars—and it sure is a heap of snake for the money. Heap cheap, as he says."

"Well, I'd give him one," said the Captain. "Pay that to kill it, and if I don't buy it he'll probably git mad and turn it loose 'round here to bite somebody. Give you dolla', Tommy. One dolla'," holding up one finger.

"*She-larkin*, heap cheap," was the reply of the snake dealer.

"One dolla'!" said the Captain.

The Indian stood silent, and motionless.

"One dolla'. *One* dolla'" the Captain repeated, still holding up one finger.

No reply.

"What'll I do with him!" said the Captain, appealing to his clerk. "He will stand there all day if I don't buy his snake. *Two* dolla', Tommy," he shouted, putting up another finger. "Two!"

"*She-larkin*, heap cheap," returned the Indian.

"The greasy old red pirate!" said the Captain wrathfully. "I got a good mind to bend a ax-helve over his head. Come here scaring me half to death, and now trying to hold me up for four dollars. I'm just goin' to make him git off that porch, snake or no snake, if I never sell another Seminole a yard of red calico."

"Say, wait a minute, Cap," said Leggett, as his irate employer started for the door. "You know, I been thinkin' you might do well to buy that snake. Bisbee said he wanted everything we could get him in the way of wild things, especially out of the ordinary. Now that ain't no ordinary snake, if I'm any judge, and he may pay you a big price for it."

"Dunno but you're right, Bud," said the Captain, pausing. "I might sell that snake to Bisbee, sure enough, but I'm afraid of it getting out of that box; I bet them little slats is just tacked on."

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"Get another box and nail a piece of heavy wire net on it and make Tommy put it in before you buy," counseled Bud.

"I believe I will. Get a strong box and cut a wire cover to fit it, while I see what I can do with the copper-colored image."

WHILE Leggett prepared the box, Captain Jim negotiated further with the snake merchant. He raised his bid to three dollars, then to three-fifty, repeating each offer until met with the firm "*She-larkin*, heap cheap," and finally when the clerk appeared with a box, covered with a heavy screen wire, he capitulated.

"All right, Tommy, I buy snake; give four dolla', but you take out in woods and put in this box," setting the box out on the porch and laying on it hammer and nails.

"*Uncar*, (yes) I fix um," grunted the red man, gathering up the boxes and tools and striding off into the woods.

"Hope it won't get away from him 'round here," said the Captain, watching the Indian out of sight.

"I hope it won't bite him while he is making the change of boxes," said Bud.

"Blame near serve him right," growled the Captain.

In half an hour the Indian returned, carrying the new box with the big snake securely fastened in. Receiving in silence the agreed price, he made some small purchases and slipped out of sight over the trail leading to the fresh-water lakes lying a mile west of the settlement.

"Believe I done a good thing, buyin' that snake," said the Captain, after the Indian's departure. "If Bisbee don't want it, everybody round here will come to see it and that will bring trade. We will scare a lot of the folks and have some fun, anyhow."

For the next few days the fun was fast and furious at the Trade Emporium. Each visitor was persuaded to inspect closely the big snake, with more or less startling results.

The Doctor, of inquiring mind and very near-sighted, broke a chair and narrowly escaped with his neck, when he made the record, flat-footed back jump, on finding his face within six inches of the big snake.

Squire Pender, ponderous and dignified, upset a twelve-foot counter when he sidestepped after a close inspection.

There were other victims, each one carefully guarding the secret until every available man in the neighborhood was inveigled into inspecting, at close range, what was unanimously declared to be the biggest and most vicious rattler ever taken on the east coast. Then everybody heard of the big snake and came to see it. Business flourished and Captain Jim counted his investment a profitable one regardless of whether or not he sold the snake to Mr. Bisbee, traveling salesman for a Jacksonville house, who had so far bought every kind of wild thing he could furnish him.

"Bisbee be here Monday," said Bud Saturday morning, returning from the post-office.

"That's good," replied the Captain; "we are wantin' several things besides gettin' rid of that snake. I hope Bisbee wants it, but whether he does or not he is goin' to have a good close look at it and a scare all right. You tell any of the boys you see to drop in, casual like, to see the fun."

"Don't know about that, Captain. Scaredest man I ever saw of a snake is Bisbee, and you might spoil the chance of selling him; most took a fit last Summer when he walked up on a black snake crawlin' across the path."

"All the better," said the Captain grimly; "buy or no buy, I'll sure scare him plum stiff."

The clan gathered that night; Doctor Wetherby, Squire Pender and half a dozen more. Long they planned as to the most spectacular stage-setting for Bisbee's scare, which they determined should surpass all others. Plans, ranging from releasing the snake and locking Bisbee in with it to getting him to sit down on the wire covered box in a dim light, were duly considered, but finally, after long discussion, the Captain's plan of placing the box behind the counter on the boxes and packages of reserve stock, which Bisbee invariably overhauled, was adopted.

"The light is poor enough there," argued the Captain, "and he will be mighty close to 'Old Pizen' when he first sights him, with little space to throw fits in."

II

"MORNIN', gentlemen!" said Mr. Bisbee, as he bustled into the Emporium Monday morning, where the crowd had been waiting his coming since Leggett had thrown open the front doors.

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"How's trade, Captain? Hope you've saved me a good order; I need it, for I've been hitting it up, working nights, trying to get ahead a day to go fishing. Tide right this afternoon, and if you can get busy with me now we can get through and I can hire a boat and go out after dinner."

"Well, look over the stock and see what I need," replied the Captain, swinging carelessly around on the counter to face the point of special interest. "No need troubling myself to give you an order; you will send what you want to, and all you think I can pay for, anyway. Get busy soon as you like."

Throwing off his coat, Bisbee began to look over the stock with the skill of long practise, making a list of needed articles. Only his absorption in the work prevented his noting the intense interest with which all present watched him. Coming to the reserve stock he pulled, hauled and threw around the boxes, packages and bundles with noisy haste, until he had the snake thoroughly aroused, fighting mad and rattling furiously.

"What's that queer smell and buzzing?" he suddenly inquired as he paused in the dim light by the snake box. "Raising bees, Captain?"

"My funny bird, I guess," answered the Captain carelessly, while every one held his breath; "it's in that wire-covered box right by you there. Don't put your hand on the wire; might peck you."

Suspecting nothing and with his curiosity aroused, Bisbee stooped quickly over the box with his face almost against the wire. He could see something moving, and hear a sharp buzzing, but it never occurred to him that it was other than some strange bird or animal until his eyes became accustomed to the dim light and he saw the ugly flat head, darting tongue and wicked eyes almost in his face.

His first leap cleared the counter, and the second, made—as the Squire said, "just like a grasshopper, the way his head was p'intin' "—took him through a frame of tinware, most of which he carried with him when he brought up in the stack of salt meat on the far side of the room.

The Captain, with a howl of pure delight, let go and rolled to the floor where he was promptly joined by Squire Pender. The others, in various ways, but all noisily, expressed their appreciation of the performance. Uncle Billy Gratly, the oldest settler, cackled and choked with an occasional shrill *ki-yi-e-e-el* until the Doctor had to restrain him forcibly.

Mr. Bisbee had been at both ends of too many practical jokes to lose his temper and, though white and shaken, came out smiling from his greasy refuge, shedding tinware and brushing the salt and grease from his clothes.

"Your bird is funny all right, Captain. Gimme a dime's worth of benzine and a rag; I'm greasy as a lard-can."

While the victim, out under the trees, worked on his damaged apparel, the crowd lived over again the fun he had afforded them. The Captain declared he had jumped three feet higher than necessary to clear the counter and, by a fair estimate, his first jump would measure eight by eleven.

"Never lit at all, fur as I could see," declared Squire Pender. "Shot right on through Bud's tin pagody without even hesitatin'."

"Bet he spiled mor'n four bits' wuth o' tinware," cackled Uncle Billy.

"Captain is still a winner if he did," argued the Doctor. "Nothing but that tin blockade and the pile of meat kept him from going through the side of the house and taking most of it with him, the way he was traveling."

They had by no means exhausted the subject when Bisbee returned and announced that he was going fishing and would finish work that evening or next morning.

Buying lunch and cigars, he hurried off to the river where he found a man to furnish boat and bait. The weather was perfect, tide right and sport good, but it was only a fair string the fisherman carried back to the hotel at supper-time. He had been thinking of another matter all the afternoon and had neglected many good bites.

IT WAS no surprise, on returning to the hotel, to find every one fully informed of his adventure with the snake. Life was uneventful in the village of Dundee, and to have taken such a fall out of a cosmopolitan, as had the Captain and his cohorts, was an event.

He bore all the chaffing, from the broad banter of the hotel proprietor to the covert grin of the darkey waiter, with out-

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ward composure and good nature. Bud Leggett, who slept in a small room in the rear of the store and boarded at the hotel, came in while Bisbee was at supper.

"Party at the Squire's to-night, Mr. Bisbee," he announced as he finished supper; "got a bid for you; will you go?"

"Reckon not, thank you," replied Bisbee, who knew that he would get more real enjoyment by going down and jumping in the river than at any public gathering in the village that night. "I'll have to work to-night. Played all afternoon, you know, and must finish looking up the Captain's order."

"All right," said Bud, "you can have the store to yourself—you and your friend—I'm going to the shindy."

"Well, I'll be down by the time you are ready to go. We'll have time to finish going over the stock and be ready to get my order first thing in the morning."

When Bisbee reached the store, Bud was dressed, all but his bright red tie, which he had waited to have Bisbee adjust for him in the latest style.

Left alone, Bisbee's first act was to close the store door and turn the key. Taking the lamp, he went to the place where he had come upon the box with the snake, in the morning. It was there, just where he had seen it. Carefully he inspected it from all sides, moving quietly so as not to disturb the snake, for he dreaded the sound of its awful rattle.

The stenciled brand on the box he found to read: "Men's Box Calf, Size 6 to 12." Then he estimated its dimensions. Going to the rear, which contained a pile of empty boxes, he overhauled them until he came on one that he thought to be of the right dimensions and, turning it over, found the brand: "Men's Box Calf, Size 6 to 12." Carrying it out into the store he found it the counterpart of the box containing the snake.

He soon located the heavy mesh wire from which had been cut the piece covering the snake box. From this he cut a piece the size to cover the empty box, and fastened it on with the exception of one corner. At the corner left unfastened he tapped a nail into the wood to look as though the wire had been nailed and the nails pulled out.

This done, he went to the corner at the end of the counter where lay a pile of empty sacks and paper boxes; these he removed and then—although it made him positively ill to come in close contact with it—he carried the box containing the snake to the cleared space, pushed it into the corner and replaced the empty sacks and boxes, hiding it completely. He then put the empty box in its place and bent up the loose corner, leaving an opening. Then, with a sigh of relief, he lighted a cigar and went to the task of preparing his order.

When Bud Leggett, society surfeited and sleepy, made his appearance, Bisbee took his departure. He waited outside until the light disappeared in Bud's sleeping quarters, and then sought his room at the hotel.

III.

"STIRRIN' early this mornin'," said Bud, when Bisbee joined him at breakfast. "Sleep good or was you too tired?"

"Slept fine, thank you. Just want to finish my work before it gets hot. All quiet at the Emporium this morning?"

"Yes, no rush on so far as I could see."

Relieved that Bud had failed to discover the empty snake box, Bisbee finished his breakfast and accompanied him to the store. With his fund of good stories he entertained him until the Captain's appearance, and then, as he intended, it was too late for the usual morning sweeping out.

The order disposed of, the Captain wandered out into the store for a final survey to see if anything had been overlooked.

Around the sawdust box sat the Squire, Doctor, Leggett and Uncle Billy, uniting their powers in graphic description of the fearful scare administered Bisbee, for the entertainment of a newcomer, the boss of a near-by turpentine camp.

Back to the counter, where sat the empty snake cage, strolled the Captain and bent over for a look in, just as the Squire, who had the floor, was describing Bisbee's jump.

"Yes, sir, by cricky," said he, swinging his arm to point the spot, "he went up—up—up——"

They all turned in the direction his arm pointed and at once saw the cause of the interruption. The Captain, white of face and gasping like a landed fish, stood staring at them from behind the counter by the snake box. His mouth moved, but no

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sound was heard; his body was rigid, his eyes rolling wildly.

As Bud Leggett expressed it later:

"A man with a glass eye could 'a seen he had a plum big scare throwed into him; he couldn't do nothin' but make faces."

"Shu—u—u!" hissed the Captain finally, "*he's loose!* The big snake's loose; busted the top off the box and got out! I'm afraid to move; don't know where he's at; may be right ag'in my leg," he wailed, "ready right now to sock it to me! I'm scared to stay still and any way I move I may tromp right on him! Help!" he pleaded.

The Captain was proud of the prompt and unanimous move of his friends at his cry of distress until he saw that they were moving *en masse* toward the open door instead of to his aid. As one man they had started up on hearing that the snake was loose, and now with frightened glances, right and left, were making for the door, quietly but speedily, Uncle Billy toddling along in the rear.

"Don't leave me, boys!" shouted the Captain in desperation, which appeal had only the effect of causing them to increase their speed.

Frantic with fear and not daring to move in any direction where he could not see whether the enemy lay, the Captain, with a yell that fairly split the air and led his feeling friends to conclude that the snake had found and bitten him, dived headlong diagonally across the counter in the direction of the door. In distance, his jump greatly outclassed that of his victim, made from the same position the day before.

Bearing in a little too much on his course, his shoulder struck the end of the fifteen-foot show-case containing miscellaneous small articles, and spun it around, shattering the glass and throwing the contents into a tangled mass at one end. Landing on the floor, he made two or three jumps on all fours, running into and upsetting Uncle Billy, before he could overcome the impetus of the leap and recover his footing.

Close to his fleeing friends, now completely routed and at top speed, he sprang for the door just as they reached it in a body and jammed in the effort to pass through all at once. Striking fairly in their midst, he broke the jam and shot them out of the door like a handful of chaff before a strong blast.

THE Squire and Doctor went down the steps, the Squire rolling like a full sack of meal, landing on his back with legs hanging on the two lower steps, and the Doctor, heels over head, striking hard once or twice and bounding well out into the yard. The turpentine camp boss and Bud Leggett shot out at a tangent right and left; the former ripping along the edge of the steps half way down, tearing the buttons from his vest and most of the bosom out of his shirt; and the latter sailing clear off the porch, like a big bat, down to the hard-packed sand with a thud that shook everything near, but especially Mr. Leggett.

But, though each shone in his respective act, the Captain was easily the star. Straight on he continued, clearing the width of the porch and the flight of steps, landing well out in the yard with a crash that would have broken half the bones in a less wiry body.

Bisbee hurried to the door, dragging Uncle Billy to his feet in passing, and was relieved to find all showing signs of life.

The Squire's fat legs wagged feebly; the Doctor held a handkerchief to a cut on his head; Bud Leggett had turned over and was recovering his breath in loud gasps, while the Captain sat up, feeling his neck gently with both hands.

"Anybody hurt?" inquired Bisbee anxiously.

"Oh, no!" snarled the Doctor, "of course not; we're all enjoying ourselves!"

"I am," croaked the Squire; "busted half my ribs and cracked my wish-bone! Help me get straightened out, Doc."

The Doctor grabbed his feet, swung him round and he slowly got to a sitting position, groaning dismally. The camp boss sat against the lower step, anxiously overhauling his damaged apparel.

"How about you, Bud?" asked Bisbee, going to the edge of the porch. "You look sick."

"I am; an' goin' to be sicker," said that sufferer grimly. "Plum nigh busted open and swallowed a chew tobacco bigger'n a hen egg—least I reckon I did; had it when we started and can't find it nowhere now."

"What scared you all? What was you running for?" asked Bisbee with the most innocent air of interest.

"From that blamed snake!" said the Captain sourly. "It's loose in there!"

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"Putty nigh bit him; would if he hadn't jumped so quick—and so fur," piped Uncle Billy from the top step where he sat.

"Oh, you Captain!" laughed Bisbee, pointing facetiously to where he sat, dejected and wobegone, holding one hand to his neck and the other to his head. "Caught them every one. Another of your little jokes; played that funny bird on us again, but you did not catch me this time, if you did all the rest."

The four sufferers instantly forgot their wounds and turned on the surprised Captain with black looks and threatening mien, unhesitatingly accepting Bisbee's theory.

The Captain sat for a moment silent, the picture of helpless wrath, and then burst forth:

"Joke! one of my jokes! Do I look like a joke? Take me for a plum fool? Git right ag'in the wickedest big rattlesnake in the whole State of Florida and jump forty feet to save my life and you call it a joke! If you'd been standin' where I was with that big rattler drawin' back to sock his tenpenny fangs into you clean up to the gums, I reckon you wouldn't think it no joke! If I wasn't too busted up I'd come up there and shove you inside and lock the door on you and I reckon you'd soon find that it wasn't so all-fired funny!"

There was no mistaking the Captain's sincerity, and all hands fell to nursing their wounds again while Bisbee hastened to apologize.

"What you going to do about it, Captain?" asked Bisbee finally. "Looks like your snake has dispossessed you, don't it?"

"Wish I had never seen or heard of the dratted reptile!" groaned the Captain, getting stiffly to his feet and limping over to a seat on the lower step. "I'm goin' to kill it the first thing I do."

"How are you going to find it?" inquired Bisbee.

"Plum sure to git bit," announced the Squire with comforting conviction.

The Captain's face fell; the seriousness of the situation began to dawn upon him.

"Well, I got to git it out of there; I've just got to!" he added helplessly.

"You surely have," assented the Doctor grimly, with an unmistakable accent on the pronoun.

"Come on, boys," said the Captain, rising, "let's go rout it out and beat its ugly head off."

No one moved.

"Ain't you goin' to help me?" he indignantly inquired, looking first at one, then another.

The silence was unanimous.

HE LOOKED the crowd over again, then turned helplessly to Bisbee, but after hesitating a moment concluded not to risk the humiliation of a refusal from his late victim.

Then it occurred to him that he had a man to take his orders and he turned to Leggett, now sitting up, pale and perspiring.

"Here, Bud," he called out as though it had just occurred to him and was no more than the weighing out of a pound of sugar, "get a stick and go kill that snake; it is right in there close by its box, too lazy to move and fast asleep, more'n likely."

"Guess again, Cap. I hired to sell goods, not to kill snakes. If disobeying orders is the price of my job you've got my resignation right now," Leggett replied.

"Oh, go on Bud! He ain't goin' to hurt you," urged the Captain. "Just rush in and fray him out before he gits away."

This request was received in silence.

"Here, Bud," said the Captain in a final effort, "you sure ain't afraid of a snake? Go on and kill it and I'll give you five dollars."

"I ain't goin' in there to risk my life huntin' that snake, and that's flat. It's your store, and your snake, and I allow it's your job!" he added with some heat.

The Captain sank down helpless and discouraged.

"How long you reckon it's been out, Captain?" asked the Squire, after the silence had become painful.

The Captain answered the question with only a negative shake of the head.

"Might just have got out and not gone far," continued the Squire. "Was it out this morning when you got up, Bud?"

"I don't know; never looked. It wasn't no enjoyment to me to look at that ugly devil on an empty stomach; it wasn't my idea of an appetizer," said the suffering Leggett.

"Well, it's out and I reckon that's far enough," said the Captain. "I don't see no chance except to lock the store up and let it starve to death—and I'll probably starve first, for I've heard they'll live six

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months without a bite to eat or a drop of water."

"Oh, say, Captain, I wouldn't lay down like that!" said Bisbee, coming down to where the discouraged merchant sat on the lower step.

"Like thunder you wouldn't!" snarled the Captain, whirling on him. "Of course you wouldn't lay down; s'pose you tell us what you would do."

"Go in there, find the snake and put it back in the box," was the reply.

The Captain treated this attempted facetiousness with silent contempt.

"I mean it, Captain; I would do it," insisted Bisbee. "It is the only thing to do."

"Go do it, then, confound you!" shouted the Captain. "You got as good right to be bit by that rattlesnake as I have, if I do owe your house a little bill. Go on! What you waitin' for?" he stormed.

"What'll you give me?" said Bisbee quietly, which the Captain received as a further attempt to annoy or insult him.

"A welt over the head with the first thing I can lay my hand to!" he howled, scrambling stiffly to his feet and looking about him for a weapon.

"No, no, Captain, don't get mad; I ain't fooling, honest I ain't; I really believe I can help you and I will. Quit your rarin' round and get down to business; I can get that snake out of your store and I'll do it. Now what is the job worth?"

The Captain seemed loath to treat the proposal seriously, but his friends were all inclined to listen to Bisbee, his earnestness almost convincing them.

"Talk to him Cap," urged the Squire. "'Tain't goin' to do no harm for him to try and he might think up something or some way to git it out."

"I will get it," said Bisbee positively, "but you must talk fast, Captain, for I've got other business I'm supposed to be attending to besides snake-catching, and my train will be coming along in an hour or so."

The Captain, by an effort, controlled his wrath and, turning to Bisbee, said, "You mean you got a plan to try to get the snake out to-day—now?"

"Inside half an hour, if at all. I'm ready to go in right now, if you say so."

They were all crowding around Bisbee, impressed by his confident air.

"What's your price?" said the Captain, finally.

"What'll you give?" was the reply.

"You know's well as I do what I got, or at least what I would have if I could git it," looking sourly up at the half-open door of the store. "Just say what you want for the job complete."

"Ten dollars," said Bisbee promptly.

"All right," said the Captain slowly.

"And the snake," added Bisbee.

"Yes, you bet!" said the Captain quickly.

"Stand right here, all of you," said Bisbee, pulling off his coat and laying it down. "Keep perfectly quiet and watch the door, which I will leave open a few inches. Call me at once if the snake comes out the door, and if I call for help, come in."

At this stage of the instructions there was an uneasy stir in the crowd. "Don't be afraid to come if I call, for I will not call you until I have the snake."

MOUNTING the steps he entered the store, pushing the door almost to behind him.

Bud Leggett was the first to break the silence. "What you s'pose he's up to?"

"Making a fool of himself, and us, too, I think," growled the Doctor.

"Well, I don't know; talked mightily like he knew what he was about, don't you think so, Captain?" said the Squire.

But the Captain did not answer. His gaze was fixed on the door.

"The idea of his goin' in there knowin' the snake is loose, when he nearly died from seein' it in a cage!" said Bud. "What in thunder you reckon he's doin' anyhow?"

"Catchin' it, I bet you," said the Squire. "He was just actin' scared the other day to make us think he was afraid of the snake."

"Acting!" snorted the Doctor. "If that was acting, he's wasting his time selling goods."

"Say, Cap," the Squire suddenly suggested, "s'pose he gits bit?"

"Well, he may," replied the Captain.

"But, s'pose it kills him!" urged the Squire.

"I reckon it would," said the Captain.

"But Cap, you hired him to go, knowin' the snake was loose and might bite him; wouldn't you be access'ry before the fact of killin' him? Blamed if I don't believe you would! I think you better call him back; make him come out; I wouldn't take no such chances."

This view of the case, taken by the legal

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light of the community, impressed the Captain and he seriously considered taking the Squire's advice and recalling Bisbee, but after deliberation concluded to risk letting him go on.

"Can't do nothin' but hang me if he gits killed, and if he don't git the snake, I'll starve; 'bout as broad as it's long; I'll chance it."

Meanwhile Bisbee had not been idle. His first act after getting inside and closing the door was quietly to rip the wire top off the empty box and return it to its place. Then, uncovering the box containing the snake, he pushed it out on the floor. Now came the part he dreaded, but he knew his success depended upon doing it, and he did not hesitate.

With a hammer he pulled nail after nail out of the wire at one corner of the box, until he had it loose for about the space of the box he had just disposed of, holding the wire down carefully with the end of a piece of box top. He had thrown the nails away as he drew them, and now he pitched the hammer back into the corner and called the Captain.

There was great excitement outside, and for a moment no one moved, but when the call was repeated and Bisbee urged them to come in, they cautiously mounted the steps. Pushing open the door, they saw him standing quietly by the box, pressing down one corner of the cover with a board.

"Get your hammer and nails, Captain, and come nail the cover down again; I've got him," Bisbee calmly announced.

But not until he and the others had crept up and looked down, in breathless surprise, on the big snake, safe and secure in the box, did the Captain heed the order.

While the Captain nailed the wire back, using big nails and plenty of them, Bisbee was besieged with questions as to how he had captured the snake, but would give no information.

"Now he's yours, take him out of here," said the Captain as soon as the last nail was driven; "then come get your money."

With the assistance of Bud Leggett, Bisbee got the snake outside and found a man with a team who agreed to carry it to the express-office.

"Now how did you do it, Bisbee?" asked the Captain, as they were settling accounts.

The question was asked in a careless manner, but the merchant was fairly consumed with curiosity.

"Sorry, Captain, but I can't tell you," said Bisbee firmly.

The Captain insisted and importuned.

"I just can't afford to," Bisbee finally explained. "It would hurt my business to have it known that I can handle poisonous snakes. Everybody thinks I am afraid of snakes, and I want it to go at that. But I'll say right here, Captain, if ever another of your snakes gets loose, you wire me, and I will help you out every time."

"Thanks, I ain't goin' to need you," said the Captain dryly. "I've owned my last snake. I wouldn't buy another if its stripes was solid gold and every rattle a diamond!"

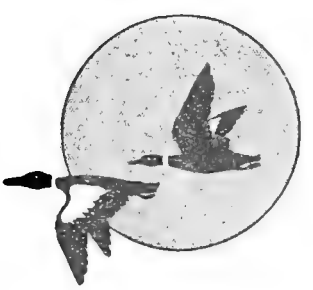
"LETTER from Bisbee," said Bud on his return from the post-office a few days later.

The reading of Mr. Bisbee's letter seemed to stir the Captain so profoundly that Bud took the first opportunity, during his employer's absence from the store, to investigate the cause. He found it to be the following:

P. S. By the way, Captain, I turned the big rattler over to a snake expert here, and he says we had no need to be afraid of it whatever. Every fang drawn, its gums smooth as a baby's, and no more dangerous than a fish-worm.

Yours,

BISBEE.



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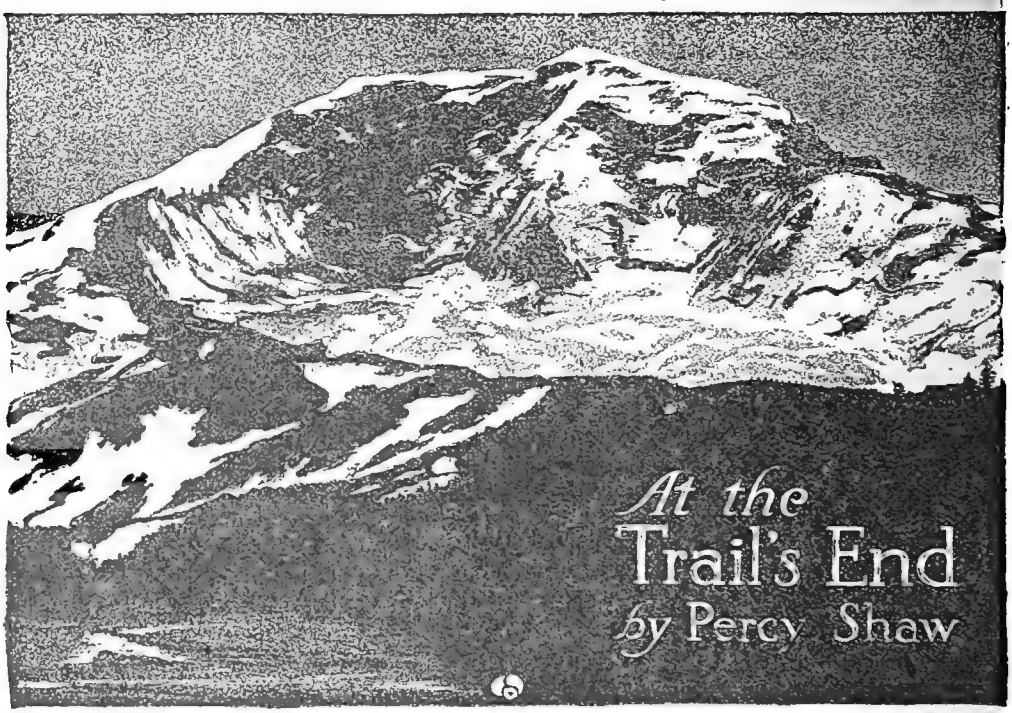

At the Trail's End

by Percy Shaw

SHE was leaning against a box on Valdez Flats; I never would have noticed her anywhere else, but her presence in that place was enough to make a blind man stare. Was she pretty? Well, not then; she was dressed in yellow woolen, man-fashion, and about all you could see of her was her eyes. They shone like two pieces of blue sky under her fur cap. The minute you looked you knew she was honest, and when a woman is honest you can bank on the rest.

Perhaps you've never been in Valdez—don't even know where it is? All the better, for on this particular March afternoon it was a mud-hole; the sea was out, and the *Valencia* from Seattle had just finished dumping on the mud the belongings of several hundred gold-seekers.

The cheerful intimation that the tide would soon carry everything off had added an intense anxiety to the work of toting boxes, bags and bundles back to the snow-line. They were piled there in an aimless heap round which the owners, unable to identify their property, circled like so many hyenas. The light, meantime, began to fade; only a few knew anything about rigging a tent, yet obviously it was impossible to stay out in the cold all night. Men looked at each other and kicked their toes into the crust.

The hour of trial had begun; as a contrast to the ambitious boasts over the poker table in the ship's smoking-room, it was most effective.

I fished a piece of chocolate out of my pocket and walked to the girl near the box. "Have a bite?" I said.

She helped herself and began to nibble; "It's good," she said, between whiles, "and to tell the truth, I'm hungry."

I stood looking at her. "Waiting for some one?" I asked.

Her voice wavered a trifle. "Oh, no, I'm going to find some one."

"Better let me do it; they're all off the ship now; what's he like?"

She faced me bravely. "He's not here," she said; "he's over there—somewhere," she gave an indefinite sweep of the arm including the glacier that loomed like a death's head before us.

"Good heavens!" I cried, "you're not going over there alone?"

"Oh, yes, I've got to." There was a calm finality to her tone.

"See here," I told her, "it's none of my business to ask questions, but you can't do

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that; I've got a horse and a Siwash dog; you come along with us."

She looked at me hard, then she pulled off one of her mittens and showed me the third finger of a red left hand; there was a ring on it and a little diamond that sparkled like an icicle.

"I understand," I said; "that's all right."

She fixed her eyes on mine and held out her other hand. "I always said there'd be a way out," she remarked with a smile. "Now tell me what to do; all I got's in there," she pointed to the box; "the rest's in my belt, and my name's Polly."

"You got prospecting sense," I announced. "See all these tenderfeet loaded to kill? See that mountain there? Looks as if it was across the back yard, don't it? Well, I'll wager it's seven miles off. Why, there ain't one in ten ever'll get to the other side of it. We'll figure up what you got and what I got, and what we don't need we'll sell while the price is high. If you travel far you got to travel light. There's my tent and pole over in the snow yonder."

"You mustn't make any fuss about me," she said, as she slid along over the crust," I knew what I'd have to do when I started."

She helped me set up the pole while most of the prospectors hustled back to the ship for a last night of comfort aboard. It was nearly dark when we finished, and maybe it wasn't cold!—but she never complained.

"There isn't any wood about," she said. And there wasn't. All you could see was everlasting snow and ice. I side-ended the box to the tent and we pried open the top.

"I read what to take," said Polly with pride.

"It's splendid stuff—to leave behind," I told her. "But these fancy crackers and this condensed milk'll help a little; also this candle."

Ever eat frozen condensed milk, crackers, lady-fingers and such, with the mercury edging to twenty-seven below, and you in it? It tasted good just the same.

"I'd be all right," said Polly, "if I could keep my feet warm."

"You can't use ceremony here, Polly," I said, fishing her sleeping-bag out of the box. "Roll up in this and I'll do the same in mine; we'll have the horse and the dog to-morrow."

She paused, then—"I suppose you won't mind if I say my prayers?"

I was half inside my bag. "Go ahead," I told her, "pray as much as you like; it can't do any harm."

I tried to go to sleep, but of course I heard her, and it seemed to me I was back in Eden, Iowa, kneeling by my mother's knee; I kept thinking how I'd feel if any girl thought as much of me as Polly thought of that fellow up the Copper; but anyhow I made a vow I'd look after her first, last and all the time, till she found him.

SLEEP'S a good thing, but I was out long before Polly was awake. It was three miles to the nearest clump of trees and they were waist-deep in frozen crust, but I had a dozen slices of bacon sizzling over a hole in the snow when Polly turned out.

"I can't wash my face, can I?" she asked.

"You can not," I told her; "fire's too precious to waste melting snow, except to drink."

"I never tasted anything so good," she said, making a sandwich of some tea-biscuit and bacon and washing it down with coffee.

"I'm going to the boat," I said, "after my horse and dog. You get all the things out of that box of yours and we'll get rid of 'em."

"Oh," cried Polly, "and what'll we live on?"

"Bacon and beans for breakfast, and beans and bacon for dinner, which same is easy to carry."

You never saw an animal so astonished as my horse when I led him up to the tent. He was glad to be off the boat after all the tossing he'd got, but he was sure perplexed by the scenery. Siwash, the dog, was Polly's good friend right away.

"He'll be our chaperon," she laughed.

Siwash wagged his tail—he knew; all through the cold weather he'd curl up inside her bag at night, as close as if she'd been his mother.

We sold off the fancy crackers and the delicatessens Polly had brought and I handed her $326, which was three times what she'd paid for them.

"Now," I said, "we'll strike camp and I'll show you how to get over the country before she melts under your feet."

When we pointed for the foot of the glacier, we had on the sled, besides the tent, four hundred pounds of food, and one hundred of that was oats for the horse. We passed a score of fellows who'd come up with a ton.

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They were dragging a couple of hundred-weight toward Valdez Mountain; then they'd go back for another load; ten trips for the cache. That meant a hundred and forty miles before they mushed their stuff from the water's edge over the seven miles to the first bench.

"Even I knew enough not to take as much as that!" said Polly, trudging at my side, while the horse's hoofs made the crust crackle.

"Sure you did," I replied, smiling at the thought of the angel-food she'd picked out. "What d'you know about this chap's whereabouts, anyway?" I asked, nodding at the mountain.

"I'll tell you," she said. "His name's Charlie, and he's the finest fellow in the world."

"Well, Polly," I laughed, "he must be, for you to be going to him all the way from Indiana."

She looked at me. "I had to," she said. "Do you think it's going to be hard to find him?"

I reassured her, all the while knowing that Indiana wasn't big enough to make a lump of sugar for Alaska's coffee-cup; she seemed a lot easier.

Then she said, "I suppose it seems queer—a girl coming up here alone, doesn't it?"

"Nothing's queer that's natural," I said. "I've never been in love myself, but say, if I was Charlie, I'd about feel as though I owned this whole shooting-match."

"The mountain doesn't grow any nearer," said Polly irrelevantly; "I'll wager it's a mirage."

"No, it ain't; it's just plain provoking till you get used to it. See that line like a black thread on a white table-cloth and those things like ants crawling up there? That's the trail."

"It doesn't look as if we'd ever make it," said Polly.

But of course we did, and if ever we slept it was that night under the shadow of the big ice mountain.

The next morning when we reconnoitered that first bench we just stared at each other.

"We'll have to carry Bill up between us," was Polly's observation; Bill was the horse and she patted him on the nose as she said it. "Take a peep, old fellow; what do you think? Pretty steep and slippery, isn't it?"

Whatever Bill thought, he didn't say, but somehow by zigzagging every which way, he got to the top with Siwash just ahead, wagging his tail for encouragement.

You might have thought Bill was a rhinoceros, the way men stared at him; and he wasn't much of a horse either. If ever I saw the lust of ownership, it was in the eyes of those miners. It was twenty-two miles to the top of Valdez, and we halted on the summit at the end of the second day. It was a month, we afterwards learned, before the fellows on foot made it.

There's something catching about the top of a mountain, especially when you're on it. Polly didn't say a word, but a couple of tears trickled down her cheeks as she looked off; we were only a mile up, but it was some view below; mountains and valleys and clear sky and, best of all, patches of brown here and there.

"It's bigger than I thought," said Polly. She was right; it did make you feel pretty small.

THERE were a score of prospectors ready to go down, all loaded to death; they'd pile their sleds high and start, thinking what a cinch it was compared to the climb up. After a while the sled would begin to tug, then she'd break away and beat it down those eight miles like a shooting-star, leaving a trail of beans and bacon and corn-meal and all sorts of housekeeping stuff.

"How are you on a horse?" I asked Polly. "Because here's your chance."

I hoisted her up and she rode down the glacier in style, with Siwash frolicking in front and me holding the sled back.

There were more men at the bottom. We even saw a fellow panning dirt and showing color.

"Shucks!" I told Polly, who was struck with wonder. "You can find that most anywhere in the States; the thing is to find enough of it."

There were prospectors coming back, too, chock-full of wonderful tales, and Polly asked 'em about Charlie,—I stayed away when she did that,—but they'd never heard of him. All they could talk about was "strikes" and "finds," and the crowd hung on to their words and asked 'em all sorts of questions but one—why they were going home.

We pulled along the valley where the

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Tezlina was breaking up and hit Lake Marguerite and the trail for Copper Center. When we were drawing near to the big river Polly called a halt.

"Look here," she said, "I don't want to take you out of your way."

"Polly," I said, "you talk as if I were seeing you home from a church fair."

"Listen," she went on; "here's where the ways part. I don't know whether Charlie went up or down, do I?"

There was no answer to that till a bright idea hit me. "From what I know of prospectors," I said, "I'll bet he went up; these fellows try to get as far away as they can. They'd laugh if you told 'em there was gold in their back yard, but tell 'em it's at the North Pole, and they'll break their necks getting to it."

"You've been mighty good to me," said Polly. "Charlie's full of dash and I suppose he would go up."

We edged along the Copper, past men towing boats they had built in the Winter, and past caches of goods, too, with notices on 'em that read like this:

TAKE ME WITH YOU

"That don't look like gold, does it?" I asked. Polly shook her head.

"Suppose you shouldn't find Charlie," I said. "What then?"

"I've got to find him!" she answered.

I pressed the point. "Yes, but just supposing you couldn't?"

"I'll have to stay here till I do," she said.

"Polly," I remarked, "I got to go through to Circle; you come along, and when I'm finished I'll stay by you."

"You will?" she cried. "Then you aren't prospecting?"

"Me?" I laughed. "Me prospecting? I should say not! I stopped that foolishness when I was eighteen."

"What *are* you doing then?" she insisted.

"I'm hunting for Charlie," I replied.

She took it all right, though I could see she was curious. Women are born that way; they can't help it. Polly could have had any of my secrets, but you can't give away what don't belong to you.

It was growing warmer and the mosquitoes started in strong.

"I didn't know they had them here," said Polly.

"Oh, you didn't! You multiply the stars in the sky by all the pennies John D. owns and you'll twig an idea of how many there are to the square foot in this country."

So we wore our nets and smudged out the tent and covered Bill and tried to keep our tempers. When we caught our first salmon we felt better about it.

It was almost like a dinner at the Palace in Frisco, only better; Polly had braided her hair for the occasion and, tanned as she was, she looked like a queen, all right.

"We don't know what it is to feel well in the States, do we?" she asked. But she said it on a windy day when the skeeters weren't working.

We didn't make very good time after the snow went; the trail the army people had cut was worse than no trail at all; they'd slash a tree regardless and when you landed on a precipice edge you'd have to turn back, just as they'd had to, and hunt for the place where they'd tried to go on.

THEY say troubles always come in pairs. It was after a whole day of being lost that we got a chance to reflect on our good luck to date. We'd led Bill up a hill among boulders neck high, until he turned and asked us, with his eyes, if we thought he was a balloon. Perhaps he was tired; anyhow he stumbled into a swamp-hole after we hit the level and broke his leg.

Polly was down on her knees in a second. We both felt the bones; there was no mistake about it. The girl flung her arms about his neck and Siwash licked the poor fellow's nose.

"You'd better get out of pistol-shot hearing," I said, with a lump in my throat.

"Oh, no, no!" cried Polly, tears streaming down her face.

"We can't leave him here to suffer," I said, and began to unstrap the pack. We carried our provisions into a clearing and I left Polly there with Siwash. When I returned to them she had the dog in her lap. There wasn't any use saying anything.

"He knew what you were going to do?" stammered Polly.

I nodded.

"I guess we'll be moving on," I said; but it was a different matter now.

"I'll carry the tent," Polly volunteered.

"We'll drop the tent and take the blankets," I decided, and we set off with just enough to last us for a couple of weeks,

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seeing fish were plenty, and berries, too.

"How far are we from Circle?" Polly asked, at the end of a trying day's tramp.

I didn't answer just then, for a big brown bear ambled in front of us. Polly clapped her hands over her mouth and Siwash made for the brambles, but Bruin never stopped; I was fingering my revolver.

"Don't shoot!" whispered Polly.

"No fear," I whispered back, "I always let well enough alone."

WELL, it's what you call a "bromide" when you say, "everything comes to an end," but we pulled into Circle in good time. That was some journey and the days were cutting short mighty fast.

Polly asked all over the place for news of Charlie, but she'd got used to the idea that Alaska wasn't a back yard, and wasn't terribly surprised when nobody knew anything about him.

I'd kept my eye peeled for the twin to the trouble that made Bill break his leg and me put a bullet into his faithful head, and I found it unexpected enough. I was walking down the street in Circle when I ran into a bunch of miners back from the Tanana. There were three of 'em and the fellow in the middle stood head over the rest.

I held out my hand. "Hello!" I said.

He looked puzzled, but he shook, and then I whipped out my gun and slipped on the irons so quick he didn't know where he was at.

"In the name of the Federal Law!" I said, as the other chaps moved toward me, and I flashed my shield.

It stopped 'em like an electric battery.

"What'd he do?" they asked, still threatening.

"Robbed a bank," I said, "that's all. I've been on his trail for two years."

"How about it, pal?" they asked.

"He's right," he said. "I'm glad it's over; good-by, you fellows."

He tried to hold out his hand, but he couldn't, and he laughed with a catch in his throat.

"How much did he get?" one of the men inquired.

"About thirty thousand."

"Then, what in —— is he up here for?" asked the other. "With thirty thousand I'd beat it for Brazil and live warm and easy."

The prisoner was a fine-looking young fellow with a clear blue eye. He didn't answer; he just turned and looked, and then he swung round on his heel.

I felt sorry for him. "Struck anything?" I asked the other two.

"Sure," they chorused; "cold and hard work and hope, but you can't pay off mortgages with hope. ——! we'd be ready to be arrested ourselves to get home!"

They ambled ahead. "S'long, pal," they called, "you got the best of it."

"When are you starting back?" asked the prisoner.

"Soon's there's a boat out," I told him. "Say, you have led me a chase! I've been around the world after you."

"You think I got that money from the Third National?" he demanded:

"I don't think anything. What'd you take it for, anyhow? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, coming from a good family, too."

"Leave my family out of it!" he broke in.

AT A TURN in the crooked pike we ran into Polly. I thought she had gone clean crazy. Her eyes were like two torches. She ran for that chap and threw her arms about his neck and kissed him and called him "Charlie dear" and "Charlie darling" and all sorts of pet names till she saw he was handcuffed.

Then she backed away and stared.

"It's Charlie!" she said to me with a great light in her face. "We can get those off in no time."

I tried to say something, but I couldn't, and Polly caught my sleeve.

"It's Charlie!" she cried.

"Polly," I said, "I'd give my right hand to have missed him. I sure would! I wouldn't cause you this trouble for a million dollars if I had 'em, but duty is duty, and I've been after him for two years and I haven't any choice."

"You've been after Charlie for two years?" she echoed, shrinking back.

"I didn't know him as Charlie," I said. "I knew him as Frederick C. Hever."

A lot of miners began to gather. "Come along," I said, and we three moved to the shack where I was putting up.

Polly didn't say a word till we landed inside. Lucky enough there was nobody there; then she sat down beside Hever and cried over him some more, while I stood by and felt like a bigger criminal than he was.

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Then Polly wheeled over to me. "I'm proud of him!" she said. "And I came up here to tell him so!

"Charlie dear," she cried, "Joe's gone, and he told the whole story before he died—how he caught you in the trap and then persuaded you to run away——"

Hever leaped to his feet with his head back; at first he couldn't believe, but when he did he didn't holler; he just smiled the way a decent chap would and said in a shaky voice, walking toward Polly:

"Polly, it's worth a lot to hear this, but it's worth a lot more to know you stood by me all this time."

"*Now* you'll take them off!" said Polly.

I looked into her eyes and I unlocked those handcuffs and turned away while he caught her in his freed arms.

After a while she turned to me. "Well," she asked, "haven't you anything to say?"

I looked at 'em both. "I'm glad you two love each other so much," I stammered, "It's a great thing."

"Yes," said Polly, coming over and putting her hand on my arm, "but there's a greater"— I stared at her—"a greater thing than the love of a brother and sister."

I felt the blood pour out of my heart.

"He's—he's your brother?" I stammered.

But Polly was sobbing against my breast and Siwash was barking his head off.

The Chaplain of the Mullingars

by Talbot Mundy

COMPANY D of the Mullingars fell in in the darkening twilight and stood at ease, while Captain Boyne paced up and down in front of them talking in low tones to his lieutenant; the three subalterns stood together at one end of the line and pretended to confer too; they were not in Boyne's confidence as yet, but there was no particular reason why the men should be aware of that; so they smoked cigarettes and whispered to one another and looked important. A British subaltern can do that as well as anybody.

The men grumbled audibly; but Tommy Atkins always grumbles and nobody took the slightest notice of it. They had marched thirty miles that day over a country that is absolutely destitute of roads, seven thousand feet or so above sea-level, and had dined at the end of it on ammunition-mule, washed down with boiled ditch-water masquerading in the guise of coffee; and now, with the cheery camp-fires beginning to glow all around them, they had been ordered to fall in for a night march to God knows where. Even old soldiers would have grumbled.

But two-thirds of Company D were sec-

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ond-year men—red-polled Mullingar yearlings, as the Colonel called them; they had had enough of barrack life to appreciate its solid comfort as compared to the savage destitution of their Irish bog-country; they had come to look for three square meals a day and long afternoons of idleness, and they had had just enough campaigning to make them homesick. Dysentery, the scourge of armies in northern India, had left them untouched as yet, and the company was still at its full strength with every man of it fit and well; but so far there had been no fighting, so they lacked enthusiasm. If they had only known it, they were going through the unpleasant but important process of being broken in; but they failed to realize it, and were about as bad-tempered as they possibly could be.

"D Company!" growled one of them; "'Tis always D Company! Dog's work to do? Sind D Company! Fatigues? What's D Company doing? Night sentry-go? D Company, and be —— to them! Sure 'tis us that's running this bloody war that's no war at all! The others are spectators!"

"An' a fine spectacle they have to look at!" answered a front-rank man. "'Tis my belief we've been sent to look for Hell, an' by the same token we've found ut! There's not an Afghan between here an' Russia!"

"Company— Tshun!" barked the Captain suddenly.

"Shuller—Umms!"

They "shunted" and "shouldered" like a regiment of veterans on parade, which is quite a different thing from veterans on campaign. The Colonel stepped from somewhere out of the darkness, answered Boyne's salute, and walked down the ranks front and rear, inspecting the men carefully.

"Order—Umms! Stand at—aise!" ordered Boyne, and the Colonel led him away out of hearing of the men to talk to him.

"Have they all got three days' rations as well as their emergency rations?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Now I'm sending you, Boyne, in order to give you a chance to break in those yearlings of yours; also because I don't believe I've got a better man. The native scouts have reported the enemy in force about twenty miles away, due north of here; one of them will go with you as a guide. They're supposed to be camped on the top of a long flat hill that runs nearly east and west across the line of march, and they've got a Mullah with them who's preaching fight.

"They don't seem to fancy a pitched battle though, and the General's afraid that they'll bolt if he sends a whole regiment to get in touch with them. So you're to go with your company and try to draw them into a fight; they'll tackle you fast enough when they find there's no more than a company to deal with.

"You'll be supported, of course. Two regiments of Ghoorkas and the Camerons have started already from the left wing; but they have to make a wide détour, and you can't expect them to connect with you before midday at the earliest. Look out for them, though, from the southwest, and after they get there take your orders from Colonel Mackinnon of the Camerons.

"Now, in front of the enemy's position, and within rifle-range, there's a cone-shaped hill that they've left undefended; your job is to get on top of that and make a *sanga* if there isn't one already—tickle 'em up with a few volleys, and then hold your *sanga* until the Camerons and Ghoorkas get in touch. Between you you ought to be able to draw them into a general engagement then and hold them until the main body can come up to finish the business. We start in about two hours' time in the same direction that you're taking, but we shall make a détour before we get there and endeavor to come up on the enemy's flank so's to cut them off if they bolt. Now, d'you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well, then, you'd better start. Oh, by the way, there'll be no water on that hill-top, remember; be sure and let your men fill their water-bottles again before you get there."

"All right, sir."

"Good-by."

"Good-by, sir. Company—Move to the front in fours—Form fours—Right!—By the left—Quick—March! Left—wheel! March at—aise! March easy!"

And D Company marched off into the darkness with the steady, inspiring tramp of well-drilled men. They might be bad-tempered and weary, but they were still the Mullingars.

THE Mullingars is the official title of the regiment that replaces their old-time number in accordance with the territorial scheme. They are the King's

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Royal Mullingars. But they are better known in clubs and barrack-rooms as the Royal and Reprehensible, and that is what they call themselves. Under that title they have torn the heart out of more than one army corps, and they have left their mark all up and down the Peninsula, and on most of the other battle-fields of Europe, in the shape of long, low mounds, with a cross at either end of them, that mark the enemy's dead—and theirs.

It was the Mullingars who held Marshal Ney in check for half a morning at Quatre Bras until Picton and the Duke of Brunswick could bring the main body up to deal with him.

And later, at Waterloo, it was the Mullingars who formed squares in the valley below St. Jean, and stopped five charges of Napoleon's picked cuirassiers, sending them reeling back out of range again, and answering, with howls of derision, the cheers that had scared half Europe. The charge of French cavalry—even beaten French cavalry—is no Sunday-school picnic; it is likely to take the ginger out of anything it hits; but when the last charge was over, and the shattered remnants of the finest cavalry in the world were retreating sullenly up the hill again, the Mullingars were very nearly out of hand with excitement and exultation.

They were boys then, just as D Company in Afghanistan were boys; but they had caught sight of Napoleon, and their officers had to get in front of them and hold them back at sword- and pistol-point. They wanted to charge into the French lines and pull "Boney" off his horse.

It is a standing grievance among the rank and file of the Mullingars to this day that they were denied the honor. Even the six months' soldiers, just out of their recruit course, regard it as a personal affront, to be wiped out when the time comes. So, although his men were green and tired, Captain Boyne had no uncomfortable doubts about their mettle; even the greenest company of a regiment that entertains a grouch like that is a thing that an enemy should handle cautiously and at long range.

Nor had his men any doubt of him. The Mullingars are officered exclusively by Irishmen—the wild, unregenerate younger sons of impoverished gentlemen; and if you find better stuff from which to make officers than that—more reckless spendthrifts—better sportsmen—more gallant or more fearless gentlemen—or any one more volcanically unconquerable in the teeth of repeated disaster, go forth and conquer the world, for you have the key of it.

The Mullingars live by backing one another's bills and selling horses to the Sassenach, that being about the only thing a Sassenach is good for in their opinion; and they are afraid of absolutely nothing above the earth, or in the waters under the earth, except dishonor. Their honor is the honor of the regiment, so their men love them.

They marched off behind Captain Boyne footsore and grumbling but quite confident in his ability to lead them, and ready to go wherever he went and guard him with their lives. There is no loyalty in all the world so intense as that of an Irish soldier for his officer, provided the officer is all he should be; and Captain Boyne was.

But although Boyne knew that the men who marched behind him were game to the last kick, he knew, too, that they were in an uncommonly nasty temper and would need handling.

A night march of twenty miles, overcoated and burdened with three days' provisions, is no joke for men who have already negotiated thirty miles of execrable country that day. It is not impossible, especially for an Irish regiment, but it is likely to entail considerable suffering, and Boyne's eagerness for the coming scrap was considerably modified by the knowledge that he would have utterly leg-weary men to handle when he brought it off. The men had not even an inkling of the fight in front of them as yet, so he halted them when they had progressed for a mile or two and told them. Their response was instant; and though footsore from their previous hardships that day, they marched in expectant silence, and the grumbling ceased.

II

BUT the short halt had given time for something else to happen; and it was the one thing besides the prospect of a fight that was needful to make the men feel absolutely satisfied. Just as Boyne had barked out his order to resume the march, and had stopped for a second to light his pipe under the cover of his cape, a hand struck him on the back from behind with a thud that was meant for the seal of

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friendship. It had the more immediate effect, though, of making him swallow a mouthful of smoke, and while he was coughing it up again his assailant—a bulky, burly-looking figure of a man that seemed to have sprung suddenly from nowhere—had a chance to get in the first word.

"If that was not the worst path I ever followed," he panted, "I'll eat my cassock! I felt sure over and over again I'd lost the way. I tell ye, it was no joke! But listen to me, Boyne, me boy, ye're making the pace too fast! The boys'll be half dead long before they get there, and them with a fight in front of them. Steady now. Take it easy! Ye've the whole night in front, and only twenty miles to go—go slow."

"The Colonel gave you leave to follow?" asked Boyne when he had finished coughing.

"He did not. But he forgot to issue any orders about my staying in camp, either."

"So you lay low and slipped away after us when no one was looking—eh, Father?"

"I did. These boys of yours are all green and they're dog-tired into the bargain; they'll need me to-night. So I'm here."

"Um-m-m! Did it never occur to you, Father, that the firing-line is no place for a priest? Hadn't you better go back? I could spare a couple of men to show you the way."

"Hear him now! Would I have come if I'd meant going back before the end? Tell me that! I'll not interfere, Boyne; have no fear of that. But I'm an older man than you, and I've seen more; I'm telling you these boys'll need me before another day's finished. Go ahead and do your business, and leave me to do mine. If I can do mine as well as I know you can do yours, I'll be a proud man. They'll have need of us both, and 'tis good we're both here."

"But can you march, Father?"

"As well as you."

"I don't like it."

"Then lump it, my son! I'm here, and I won't go back unless by force. Ye won't use that!"

"No, Father, I'll not use force; but I'll ask you to go back. Now be reasonable and do as I ask you, won't you?"

"Once and for all, no! I know my duty; it lies here."

"All right; your blood be on your own head, Father! I'll say no more. I'll make use of you, though."

"Anything I can do——"

"You can do it better than any other man in the world; you can have the very pleasant job of spurring on the rear-guard. You'll be safer there than in front, too. But don't blame me if the work's harder than you bargained for."

"I'll take you at your word, my son; you lead 'em, and I'll bring up the rear. I notice the men are not talking; have ye given orders for silence?"

"No. Make all the noise you like until I give the word."

"Thanks. Good-by, then, till we get there."

"So long, Father."

Father Callan halted to let the column overtake him, returning the greetings of the subalterns as they passed, and eying the men with almost the expression of a cattleman sizing up a mob of steers. It was part of his trade to know all about men, and he diagnosed the condition of D Company, as they filed past him in the darkness, with absolute and unbiased accuracy.

The officers were tired, but not so heavily loaded as the men, and going stronger; the men were dog-tired, and though all of them were quite anxious to reach the scene of the promised fight, some of them were getting sleepy; and the men that stumbled swore unwholesomely.

They tossed his name from rank to rank as they recognized his burly figure standing motionless like the shadow of a rock in the black darkness; and several of them called out a greeting to him.

"Yes," he answered, "'tis Father Callan sure enough. And he's lookin' at the gloomiest company of rookies that ever marched in their sleep! What's come over ye? Have they cut your tongues out, that ye don't sing?"

AS HE fell in behind them his bass voice lifted in a marching song, and in less than two minutes he had them all singing. The result was just what he intended; now, when a man fell headlong, and that happened every other minute, for the track was all rocks and a yard wide in places—the vile oaths gave place to laughter. The men woke up and chaffed each other, shared their tobacco and called their bosom friends by opprobrious epithets, which is always a good sign.

By and by they broke into wild Irish songs, any one of which would have frozen

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the marrow of the authorities at home; they sang of mutiny, and of treason to the Crown, and of the glorious days of prophecy when Ireland should come into her own again; but that is the way of Irish regiments when they are about to strike a blow for England. The unchristian track slid past them for a while as though they were just starting on their first march that day.

But human muscles have their limitations; and soldiers' feet are not like ammunition-boots that are good for so many thousand miles of marching either with intervals or without them. The boots held, but the feet gave out. Will-power, stirred up by songs and an expert like Father Callan, will accomplish wonders; but by and by, as the track grew worse and worse and the night grew colder, their rifles and haversacks grew heavier than lead, and their ammunition-pouches seemed to weigh a ton apiece; then the will-power died down again, and men began falling to the rear, and Father Callan's labors began in real earnest.

His voice rang clear and cheery through the frosty night, but he wasted no sentiment on them; he ragged them and called them cowards; he threatened to expose them as malingerers before the whole regiment; and he carried two rifles for them, giving two men at a time a chance to rest themselves that much.

But they kept on dropping to the rear, and the rest of the company kept drawing farther and farther away in the distance; after three hours of constant effort, Father Callan found himself with a sergeant and one-and-twenty men fully two miles behind the main body, and there seemed no hope of catching up! Boyne had counted too implicitly on Father Callan's magnetism, and had made the pace too hot.

There was an almost trackless mountain now between the company and Father Callan, and the men with him were getting into that hopeless, sullen state that is the most difficult of all to deal with; moreover, they were in very real danger of losing their way, for the native guide was in front with Boyne, and no sounds even reached them now to guide them.

By and by, after about another hour of it, they overtook a subaltern who had waited for them by Boyne's orders. He lent his vocabulary to Father Callan's, and that helped a little, but very little; Terence Darcy was a very young officer, and the men took little heed of him; they were too dead beat to mind even his derision.

"Is that red-headed, hot-brained lunatic Boyne likely to call a halt presently, d'ye think?" asked Father Callan, as he burdened himself with a soldier's haversack.

"No. He says he won't halt again until he reaches the *sanga*. His orders are to be as quiet as we can now, as we can't be very far away from the enemy's lines and they may possibly have some scouts out. We're to catch him up if possible; but if we can't do that we're to follow as fast as we can, and join him on the hill-top."

"Catch him, is it?" said Father Callan. "I'm thinking the devil couldn't catch him the way he's going! The Government's to blame; it comes of making officers of Irishmen; they think there's glory waitin' over the brow of every hill they come to, an' they're forever tryin' to get there first!"

Darcy took two men's rifles as well, so that four men were now marching lighter, and for a while they made better progress. But instead of getting better the track grew steadily worse, and presently they lost themselves.

"I believe we're leaping round and round in rings," said Darcy, "like goats on a hillside!"

"Hush, ye young scatterbrain! I know it! But don't let the men hear ye. They're sorry enough looking goats as it is. They'll lie down and die if they think they're lost! Let's halt a minute, and try to find the trail. Set those rifles down, and have a look for the hoof-marks of the ammunition-mules; an' sometimes the men'll drop a cartridge or two. Ye might find one."

"What, on this hillside in the dark? We'd better fire a volley to let Boyne know we're in trouble and can't find him."

"And let the Afghans know it, too! Bless the boy! That's the best idea you've thought of yet! Why, they'd be down on us in a minute! Look ahead now—can ye make out a long-backed hill, flanked by two other hills, or is it a cloud-bank? There's no telling in the darkness at this altitude. Ah! There's the moon again! Now look, d'ye see that cone-shaped hill? That might be Boyne's *sanga* he was making for. Let's camp on top of that anyhow till daylight; we'll be safe up there. What say you?"

"I say yes!" answered Darcy, who was very glad indeed to have some one to make suggestions for him.

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A boy of twenty-one on his first campaign, lost with two-and-twenty weary men in the "hills" of northern India, may wear the boldest front in the world, but he is not likely to be a very resourceful person. Like every other subaltern of the British army, Darcy was ready to assume absolute responsibility for anything at a moment's notice; he only lacked ideas.

"We'll march on that hill and camp there," he ordered, as though the notion were entirely his; and the frozen, weary men heard him and pricked up like tired horses in sight of home; they crawled to it, clambered up it, lay down on the top of it, and fell asleep. Darcy let them lie there, and he and Father Callan explored the hilltop carefully.

THERE had been a *sanga* once on the top of it—a mere enclosure of unhewn stones, shoulder high; the stones were many of them fallen and disarranged, but most of them were lying near their old position, and nearly all the big ones were still in place except for a ten-foot gap that faced due northward. Darcy and Father Callan tore and blistered their hands for more than an hour filling up the gap, and when the reflection of the coming morning showed rosy-pink in the western sky to the left of them, the gap was filled already by a three-foot wall that would give plenty of cover for a man kneeling.

"There's the morning!" said Darcy. "Thank God for that!"

"Yes, thank God!" said the priest. "We'll be able to see at last."

"Look!" said Darcy. "That must be the enemy's position right in front of us."

There was a golden glimmer in the east now, and the west grew dark again; the ice-cold morning wind that searches the nooks and crannies of the Himalayas struck them full in the face and bit like vitriol till their eyes ran.

"What'll those protuberances be?" asked Father Callan.

"Skin tents; I can make 'em out plainly."

"Are ye sure?"

"I'm dead sure. Look!" he added, pointing to the right; "there's Boyne's hill over there!"

"How far d'ye make that?" asked Father Callan, peering through the mist that was beginning to draw out of the lower ground. "Ye've got good eyes."

"About a mile; perhaps a shade more. I can see the men's helmets; they're building up the wall at the top; did you see that big rock move? Boyne's getting ready to hold that till the cows come home. Good old Boyne! Let's fire a volley and let him know we're here!"

"Yes, and wake the Afghans! 'Tis a dispensation of Providence that these infidels sleep so late; don't you disturb them, my son; they'll wake soon enough!"

"Well, we must communicate with Boyne somehow. I'd send one of the men, but they're all too dead-beat. Look at them! Did you ever see a crowd of rookies sleep like them? They look like dead men! Tell you what, I'll go myself! You stay here, Father, and take charge until I get back. I won't be long. Boyne'll think up some way out of the difficulty when he knows how we're fixed."

"Come back, ye young hothead!" said Father Callan; but Darcy was gone already and a little avalanche of stones went clattering down the hillside to mark his progress.

"*Cra-ack!*" went a long *jezail* on the hillside opposite, and "*Whee-ee-ee!*" moaned a flat-nosed bullet overhead.

"Good shooting," said Father Callan. "They must know the range."

He looked down the hill for Darcy, but failed to see him; then he turned to the sleeping men and began rousing them.

"Wake up there, boys!" he ordered "Wake up! That's right, sergeant. Now, wake up the rest and line 'em round the wall. The Afghans are awake—they'll be on to us any minute now Put some life into those men; make 'em hurry!"

"*Crack-ak-ak!*" went three *jezails* opposite, and "*Whee-ee-ee!*" whined two bullets away into the distance; the third bullet found something in its course, and stopped.

"Father!" called a voice from somewhere below the hill—"Father Callan! Can ye hear? I'm hit. Fire a volley and warn Boyne!"

"I'm coming!" Father Callan shouted. "Sergeant! Take charge! Stay here with the men until I call for you."

Then he climbed a little clumsily over the wall, for he was nearly as weary as the men had been, and dropped noisily down the hillside, loosening about a hundred stones as he sprang from rock to rock. The Afghans opposite did some amazing work with their prehistoric rifles and chipped the

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rocks all round him; but Boyne got busy a mile or more to the eastward and sent in a withering volley from his *sanga* that set the enemy's camp writhing like a snake on an ant-hill.

The Afghans turned their fire on the new danger, yelling like a pack of wolves, and they were answered by another volley and a wild cheer that is bred nowhere in the world but south of Sligo. A hot interchange of shots took place for the next five minutes, and Father Callan reached the bottom unhit.

"Are ye hurt badly?" he asked, when he had found his way to Darcy.

"Sure, Father; I'm killed. Look at this! But what are you doing here? Get back out of range!"

Father Callan set his very stubborn jaw and bent down over him.

"Son," he said, "I'll maybe hurt you, but it can't be helped; this is no decent place to die. Clench your teeth and bear it!"

Then he picked him up, as a nurse might pick a child up, and Darcy groaned. The bullets came again now like a hail-storm, for the Afghans are no subscribers to Geneva theories—or any civilized conventions, for that matter. From their point of view a good Christian is a dead Christian, and a wounded man is all the easier to hit.

They made wonderful shooting; the bullets rattled off the rocks on every side of him, but Father Callan stooped over his burden and turned his back to them, and walked steadily toward the hill he had left, circling to the southward so as to approach it from the rear and out of sight of the enemy. The fusillade never ceased for a second until he disappeared behind the hill. One bullet drilled its way through his helmet, and another clipped the sole of his boot, but he was still unhit when he reached shelter and laid Darcy gently on the ground again.

"Sergeant!" he shouted then. "Sergeant! D'ye hear me? Come down and help me!"

The sergeant came stumbling down the hill, and between them they bore Darcy to the top and laid him down in the center of the *sanga*, where the men clustered round to look at him like a flock of timid sheep.

"What's this?" demanded Father Callan. "What are ye? A Sunday-school outing? A bevy of schoolgirls lookin' at a frog? I thought ye were men of the Mullingars! Did ye never see a wounded man before? Have ye no shame that ye stand there crowding him? Is there no enemy to look at? They'll be friends over there on the hill, maybe, an' no need to watch them?"

He looked very little like a priest as he stood there and glared at them, with two days' growth of beard on his face—his torn cassock, sopping wet with Darcy's blood, tucked up into a belt around his waist—and the upper half of him hidden in a sheepskin overcoat; he wore a helmet, too, that was all awry on his head, and a stranger might have mistaken him for the blood-thirstiest scoundrel in the regiment. The old light was in his eye, though, and the men quailed before it, slinking back ashamed to their stations by the wall.

They were alone then, he and Darcy, as alone as though the four walls of a room enclosed them, and what happened in the last few minutes while Darcy set his teeth and groaned his life out has no place in this or any other story; it is enough that Father Callan was there to do his duty.

III

THE priest's eyes were dry when he had finished, and his face was firm; but there was a tightening of the lips that showed that not Darcy alone had felt the wrench of parting. He removed his sheepskin coat and laid it over the thing that was no longer a comrade in their midst; then he glanced at the shivering boys who lined the *sanga* wall, and from them to the Afghan lines eight hundred yards in front of him.

"How many rounds of ammunition have you, sergeant?" he demanded.

"Sixty rounds a man, sir."

The priest looked over to the hill where Boyne was; the sound of volley after volley came from over there, and the answering crack of hundreds of *jezails*. The Afghans had not surrounded him; they were sniping at him from under cover, and his rear was still open. Then he turned right round and gazed towards the southwest; there was the only stretch of level country—a long valley between two escarpments that would be called a canyon in any other country.

Down that stretch of level going the Camerons and Ghoorkas ought to come, but there was no sign from there as yet, nor any sound to herald them. He was not posted

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on that point; he had no idea what time they were expected, and he wasted several minutes in useless conjecture, trying to figure out the distance they would have to march and how quickly they could do it.

"Begging your pardon, sir," interrupted the sergeant, "but am I commanding here, or are you?"

"You are. I'm a non-combatant."

"'Tis likely we'll be all non-combatants directly, Father dear! I'm thinking——"

"Think this! Ye've your chance laid out in front of you to show yourself a man. Now take hold of your men, or I'll report ye to Captain Boyne for rank incompetence! Have ye inspected arms once since ye reached here? How'll your men fight with dirty rifles?"

"Squad—Fall in!" ordered the sergeant. "Right dress! Eyes front! For inspection—Port Umms!" Then he walked down the line and squinted into the breech of each man's rifle. They were clean enough. "Order—Umms!" he ordered. "All correct, sir!"

"Very well. Now, sergeant, how far d'you make it to the hill where Captain Boyne is? About a mile?"

"About that, sir."

"You address me as Father."

"About a mile, Father."

"They could hear us from here if we fired a volley?"

"Sure, Father."

"Then why not fire two or three at intervals? Captain Boyne might see a way to reach us."

"Volley firing—ready!" ordered the sergeant. "At the enemy in front—at eight hundred—present—fire!"

The volley barked out with precision for all their cold fingers, though the shots went wild. To attract Boyne's attention, though, was the main thing, and it had that effect, for, a minute afterward, the company signaler began flag-wagging from the hill.

"Can any of you read that?" asked Father Callan.

Not a man answered.

"Can you, sergeant?"

"No, Father."

"Then we'll waste no time trying. Watch the enemy and wait. Captain Boyne knows where we are now; he'll let no harm come to us."

Now, if you let the men of an Irish regiment get drunk they will fight anything except the devil; they will make friends with him. Keep them sober, by the grace of God and infinite precaution, and you may include the devil among the list of combatants; they will get him, too, and beat him at his own game. But you should keep them warm in any case, and, drunk or sober, you should keep them busy.

Father Callan knew that, and he sensed that unless something happened very quickly there would be worse than trouble when the Afghan rush came, as it surely would; there would be disgrace. The two-and-twenty Mullingars leaned against the cold stone wall and peered between the gaps at the thousands of Afghans in front of them; the cold wind searched their marrow; an occasional bullet whined overhead, and now and then a better shot than usual sent the chips flying off a rock close to the head of one of them; and the courage slowly oozed out of them till they were little more than whimpering children.

NOW the men of a Highland regiment would have fallen back on their religion in such a fix as that; they would have needed no chaplain either. They would have sung some Covenanters' hymns, and prayed long-windedly, and would have put up a fight afterward that would have gone into history as a thing to marvel at. But the Irish temperament is different. Irish soldiers seem more inclined to fight their battles on their own merits and thank God for the result afterward; it was so with the Mullingars, and Father Callan knew it.

"Rosy O'Grady" seemed to him the most likely theme to interest them at that moment, and his deep bass voice trolled out her charms till the Himalayas echoed it. And the Mullingars joined in. The song was strained at first, and ragged; but they went from that to "Ballyhooley," and from that again to "Killaloo;" their fourth song was an old-time Irish one that breathed death and damnation to the Sassenach, and in twenty minutes the two-and-twenty were their volcanic Irish selves again. Then Father Callan had time to wonder why the enemy were not attacking them.

He knew why, the moment he looked over to Boyne's *sanga*. Boyne had determined on one of those swift, sudden Celtic swoops that have made the reputations of Irish generals the world over. Father Callan's

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sanga was less than half the size of his; but he could cram his whole command into it at a pinch; there was only a mile or so to cross, and there was plenty of cover in the shape of rocks and boulders in between. He knew nothing, of course, of Darcy's death, but he did know that if Darcy could have reached him he would have done it. So he took Mohammed's tip about the mountain, and determined to go over to Darcy. As Father Callan looked across toward him, Boyne was just debouching into the valley between, and at the same minute the Afghans apparently made up their minds to attack in real earnest.

Afghans are not fools by any means. They are cruel and superstitious and very often cowardly, but they can see through a move of the enemy as readily as any one, and they divined at once the object of Boyne's maneuver. Evidently Boyne was moving to protect his weakest point. So they impeded Boyne in every way they could, disputed every inch of the way, rushed and retired, got in between him and his objective and, in fact, did everything but come to close quarters. And about two-thirds of them surrounded the smaller *sanga* and proceeded to demolish the weakest point before Boyne could get to it. They could not possibly see how many men, or how few, were in the smaller *sanga*, but their reasoning was excellent.

Father Callan found himself in the middle of a raging hell of bullets almost before he had time to look round again. The first man hit was the sergeant; he died all standing, with a bullet through his forehead, and the rest ducked lower beneath the shelter of the wall.

Father Callan was in command now; there was no doubt of it. Theoretically the senior private was the man, but who knew who the senior private was, or who had time to ask? They looked to him for orders, and he rose to the occasion. First he stooped and raised his sheepskin coat; when he rose again he held Darcy's sword in his right hand—point down and outward—and there was something in the quiver and the angle of the blade that hinted of swordsmanship.

It was he who gave the orders for the volleys and rated the men for firing raggedly; he kept hold of them as though he were born to the fighting game, and nursed the ammunition like an old soldier. The Afghans were swarming up the hillside within five minutes from the commencement of the attack.

Time and time again the defenders drove them down again with well-aimed volleys, and later, as the rushes grew fiercer and more determined, with independent firing. But Father Callan had to check the independent firing presently, for it cost too much in cartridges. Only one man was hit, and he not badly; but there were seven rounds left per man, and only seven. A glance to the eastward showed him the company fighting its way slowly toward him, but plainly in difficulties; the ammunition-mules were both dead, and the men were having to lug the cartridge-boxes with them, which delayed matters still further.

THEN came another rush of hairy, half-naked Afghans, armed with *tulwars*, and covered by a hot fire from the valley below. They swarmed up closer this time before the volleys withered them; that was partly due to their determination and partly to Father Callan's husbanding of ammunition; one man died on a Mullingar's bayonet as he reached the wall, and the volley that sent the remainder tumbling down the hill again was the last.

There was not one cartridge left! The Afghans did not know that, but they did know how few the defenders were; the last rush had settled that point, and they gathered for another rush that should settle matters. Boyne was nearer—a lot nearer—but there was time to take the *sanga* yet before he reached it.

"'Tis all up, Father," said the wounded man, wiping the blood from his temple with the sleeve of his overcoat. "They've got us now!"

"They've not! Hear that! Listen!"

There was the *bang* of volleys down below, the howling of Afghans,—and that is a frightful noise,—the rattle of independent firing, hoarse orders to advance by echelon, a bugle blowing intermittently, and a hundred other sounds. But the skirl of bagpipes carries through and over everything. The wind had changed now and was blowing from the west. The Camerons were coming from the southwest and the Ghoorkas with them; they use pipes, too, and imitate the Highlanders in every other way they can. So it was either Camerons or Ghoorkas that Father Callan heard; the tune could not be recognized as yet. Then suddenly the wind

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blew stronger, and everybody heard it, and caught the tune:

"Cock-a-doodle! Cock-a-doodle!
Way for the cock o' the North!"

The Camerons were coming. They had outmarched the Ghoorkas, and that means marching! They had heard the firing in the distance and were coming best foot foremost, pipes in front of them, sporrans swinging like clockwork, and sweeping over the ground like the advance wave of a flood. The Afghans heard the tune, too, and knew what was in store for them.

There was a hesitation in the Afghan ranks then—a distinct pause in the attack, and an interval of noisy argument. Boyne took full advantage of it, and flung his leg-weary command at the hill in front of him in a final brilliant, gallant effort to reach the top of it in time to save its occupants. The Afghans appreciated that move, too, and from the other side of the hill they came with a savage rush to finish their business before he reached it. There were no volleys to stop them this time—nothing but the natural configuration of the hill, that made it difficult for more than ten men to climb it from that side at a time. Ten of them reached the top in less than a minute, and they were followed by at least a hundred more, who crowded up behind them. They were *tulwar* men, without a rifle, or even an old *jezail* among the lot.

The first men checked when they reached the summit, and pressed back on their followers, shouting out for room; it was the gap that faced them—the ten feet of low wall that Darcy and Father Callan had raised up overnight. And in the middle of the gap stood Father Callan!

They were not in the least afraid of the boys who lined the wall on either side of him; they had dealt with bayonets before scores of times, and there were men among them who had cut down British soldiers in previous campaigns; but the strange man in the middle, whose eyes seemed to look straight into every man's at once, and whose sword pointed straight at their throats—not one man's throat, but everybody's throat—the sword whose hilt quivered, but whose point stayed still—that fazed them.

A giant burst his way through them from behind, laughing at them, and boasting what he would do. And he, too, checked when he met the swordsman. He swung his *tulwar* till the wind whistled, but he came no nearer; and the sword-point straight in front of him stayed steady as the finger of fate—steady as the two gray eyes that glittered behind it. Then they laughed at the giant, and for shame he had to fight; he swung on to his left foot and sprang in with the forty-pound *tulwar* flashing like the sheen of Summer lightning, and died, gurgling and spluttering his life out through a slit windpipe!

Not for nothing had Callan senior spent long, long afternoons teaching a future priest swordsmanship, and not for nothing had the chaplain of a regiment kept himself fit, and kept his weight down, with constant practise. Father Callan put his left foot on the dead Afghan, and his sword-point was ready for the next.

THEY rushed in then, leaping the wall, hacking at the tired-out soldiers, and avoiding the swordsman as though he were the devil. But he rallied his men into a sort of square and stood at bay in the middle of the *sanga;* and each time an Afghan came within the reach of that sword of his there was one Afghan less to go away and brag.

A hedge of fixed bayonets is an uncommonly awkward thing to tackle, especially in a hurry; there is no doubt of it, the soldiers did their share of the killing on that hilltop. They had laid hold of Father Callan and forced him into the middle of them, where they could protect him with their lives, for their fighting blood was up now. This job of exterminating a cluster of twenty men, which had looked so ridiculously easy, began to look like a long business.

And the Camerons were coming! Coming like ——, too! They halted to fire three volleys, and the bullets raked the Afghan ranks below the hill. Half of the contingent on the hillside retreated down again, but those on the top could see their quarry, and it is easier to drag a tiger from his hunted buck than an Afghan from his prey. They heard the volleys; and they heard the sharp orders, and the shouting of the Camerons, and the tramp of trained men coming at the double. But they saw the little squad at bay in front of them, and the blood-thirst was irresistible.

About a hundred of them crowded and blocked each other, and leaped at the hedge of bayonets.

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They all died up there, for the Mullingars and Camerons rushed the hill on either side, and it was cold steel that met them two ways at once. Boyne was among the first to reach the hilltop; he looked round him once, and then stooped over Father Callan.

"What's up, Father?" he asked him. "Are you badly hurt?"

"Boyne?" he answered feebly. "That you, Boyne?"

"Yes, Father—Boyne."

"Darcy died game!" said Father Callan. "How many of the boys are left?"

"Five," said Boyne, looking up and counting them.

"They're good boys, Boyne, God bless them! They never funked it once!"

Then Father Callan went to render his last account of how he had labored for the Mullingars.

A Defeat of Fate

by Arthur Carter

OLD CAPTAIN WENTWORTH limped down to the wharf in the deepening twilight of the day the *Osprey* was to sail from New Orleans. Then he sat and looked ruefully at his carpet slippers and then at the schooner. It resembled in the murky gloom, with its two dim lanterns at the bow, a coffin with candles at its head.

He sighed and glanced back along the wharf and saw Trefry, the owner. Wentworth hobbled erect, at the same time dropping a dog-muzzle.

As the owner advanced into the light he was revealed as slender, tall, about thirty-five, with a carefully-pointed brown beard and thick dark hair tumbling carelessly above his somewhat low forehead. His eyes appeared coldly blue through his rimless eye-glasses.

He carefully set down a paper-covered package and then grasped Wentworth by both hands:

"Are you all ready, and is your courage good?"

The old man suppressed a twinge that came to his face from standing.

"We'll be all ready as soon as we get a forge stowed aft and another twenty-five hogsheads of molasses into the hold. You needn't worry anything about the voyage. I've been sixty years on the water—at it

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ever since I was fifteen—and I've never lost a ship. I'm not calculating to begin with yours."

"That's the talk. Keep up your pluck, for you're going on a long voyage."

"Oh, Boston isn't such a long ways off," replied the Captain, meanwhile steadying one of his hands by grasping his flowing white beard.

"I know, Captain, the voyage will be made all right, now I've got you, a man of experience and judgment. Some skippers held back just because the *Osprey* isn't as young as she was once. What does a little age do but give seasoning? And you've got a good crew—no mollycoddles.'

Wentworth was recalling the villainous or stupid looks of his ten men and agreeing mentally when the sound of yells and of blows and kicks began to come from off the schooner. It ended with a burst of profanity from Grueber, the general handy man and bully of the crew, as he seemed to triumph. Trefry listened without comment.

Wentworth reached to his hip pocket to feel that his automatic pistol was in place.

"Carrying a quart?" Trefry asked.

Without waiting for an answer he gave the Captain the package, slapping him on the back and saying:

"Here's something special I've brought for you—a gallon of old Bourbon. I told them at the San Carlos to give me the best in the hotel, and I'm a good enough guest there, so I know they would try to do it. You're to drink every drop of it yourself."

Wentworth started to answer "I nev——" but checked himself and confusedly thanked the giver.

"I don't want you to begin drinking this," Trefry continued, "until my birthday, and that's the twentieth of September. You'll be half-way through your voyage then, and I want you to take a good long drink to a successful completion and another one for good luck for me."

"I won't drink a drop before. The twentieth of September, you say."

Trefry smiled.

Just then his foot struck something. He looked down.

"What's this," he said impatiently, "a dog-muzzle?"

He started to kick it over the side of the wharf.

"Don't do that!" exclaimed Wentworth hastily. "I just dropped it."

Trefry desisted.

"Going to get another dog?"

"I'll never get another! I'm taking the muzzle aboard just as a sort of keepsake. His dying hit me pretty hard. No dog lives a great while, but Crunch was only a puppy when I got him in nineteen-five, and one expects a dog to live longer than six years. He would have if some scoundrel hadn't killed him."

"It's too bad," his hearer exclaimed hastily, and then turned away and departed.

Wentworth fumbled absent-mindedly with his flowing bow tie, then stooped slowly and picked up the muzzle. In a few minutes a boat took him to the schooner.

II.

LOFF through the Gulf of Mexico, and for a week thereafter, the wind was light and the *Osprey* sailed with it. A couple of men pumped for only about an hour a day.

The Captain did nothing but sit on deck with his feet in the sunshine. Occasionally he drew deep breaths and enjoyed the combined odor of molasses, tarred rope and salt water. He tried to keep an eye on the crew, but most of the time he dozed and left everything to Anderson, the mate.

The mate was as old as the Captain and had dull eyes and a slack mouth.

One afternoon the Captain, well warmed by the tropical sun, reached for his cane and started walking. He walked back and forth several times, and then an extra hard pressure sent the cane point through one of the deck planks. He saved himself with difficulty, withdrew the stick and looked carefully at the hole. He ordered Grueber to fit in a new piece of plank and to bring him the section cut out. The Captain examined it through his steel-bowed spectacles, shredded it with his knife, powdered the shreds in his fingers and muttered, "Old, old!"

For days after that he watched the sky and the barometer.

He confided to the mate: "People have been saying—oh, I've heard 'em—that I was getting too old to be Captain. I had tried, for a fact, quite a spell before I got this ship, but the owner of the *Osprey* just looked at me and said, 'You're the man for me.' If I never do anything else I'm going to get his ship safe into port."

The mate made no comment.

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The Captain went on: "Anyway, I won't worry, for, of course, you know all about navigation, so if I give out, you can run things."

Anderson finally understood and flushed.

"I'm pretty rusty—guess I've forgotten all I ever knew of it. For the last six months all my head has seemed to be good for is to ache. I think it would clear up if I could only sleep right. Some nights I don't sleep at all, and even when I do it's troubled and I wake at the least noise."

The pause which followed was becoming awkward. "Are you going to keep right on sailing?" the mate asked.

The Captain shook his head.

"This is my last voyage. I like seafaring life, and I like getting into danger and seeing if I'm smart enough to get out of it, but I don't know as the rheumatism will ever leave me entirely as long as 'm on the water. It's getting better, though, just now. The baking in the sun is doing me good, and whisky is helping too."

Anderson seemed surprised.

"You don't drink, do you?"

"I never took a drop in my life," said the Captain with a slow smile, "though I reckon the red pepper I eat must make my face look as though I did. Mr. Trefry gave me a gallon of Bourbon before we sailed. I started to tell him I couldn't drink it, but kept still, as I didn't want to hurt his feelings, and his making the gift showed his confidence in me. It ain't every owner would give a captain a present of whisky when sending him off with a vessel. So long as I *use* his present I don't suppose he cares whether I drink or not. I rub the liquor on my ankles. I never had any help me so much as this. It must be extra good and strong. I reckon that any way it must smell pretty tempting to those who like the stuff, for the other afternoon when I went down into my cabin I found Grueber had sneaked in and had the cork out of the jug and was breathing in the fumes and acting as crazy joyful as a cat with fresh catnip."

On the morning of the last day of the fourth week the sun shone red and there was no wind. The watch talked in murmurs, meanwhile casting furtive glances around the horizon. At noon a dark green cloud began to show in the west. At the end of an hour it extended nearly half around the horizon. It rose until it formed a line across the zenith, then extended with ghastly slowness over to the east. The ship seemed as though inside a green glass dome, and the flashing and cracking of the lightning and thunder was as though a giant were smashing the glass with a white-hot hammer.

Then came whistling, rending wind and torrential rain.

ON THE morning of the second day the *Osprey* lay as spent and racked as a man of ninety who had been tossed in a blanket. Her crew shambled about the drenched and littered deck with their eyes dulled by looking at death. Half the men were at the pumps, but nevertheless the water gained.

The *Osprey* tried to beat against the remaining wind, from off shore, but this strained her, the water pouring in and making it only a question of hours before she would sink. By running before the wind the leakage was greatly lessened, so that the ship would perhaps keep afloat for two weeks, but this headed her across the Atlantic.

Those of the crew not pumping talked in a group, meanwhile casting occasional glances at Wentworth. At last Grueber approached the Captain, the others trailing after, and blurted out:

"Me and my mates think the flag should fly upside down."

The Captain stood firmly erect as he began his reply:

"I'm not going to fly any distress flag. I don't want any one to take us off or to tow us into port and claim salvage. We're going to get to Boston by our own efforts, or not at all!"

His hands were trembling and his voice shaking as he concluded.

Grueber scowled:

"I rather think, old man, we may do about as we want, but I'm willing to stay on the ship for a while. We can let her go before the wind so long as it takes us toward the Azores, and if she's going to sink, why then we'll take to the yawl, whether you like it or not—or whether you come with us or not!"

Wentworth's only reply was:

"The thing for you men to do now is to pump as long as you can and then rest and not jaw."

The next forenoon the Captain had the smallest man in the crew, the one with the green cap, stand sideways behind a paper

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curtain. A light was placed back of him and a pencil line was made around the shadow. The resulting silhouette was used as a target, which was set up in nearly the extreme bow. The Captain stood beside the wheel and opened fire. The first four shots missed. The crew were laughing. The Captain looked sadly at his shaking hand. Then he undid his tie, held one end in his left hand, letting the rest extend taut around the back of his neck, and grasped the other end in his right hand along with the butt of the pistol. The succeeding fifteen shots hit the mark. The crew looked puzzled and had ceased to laugh.

Wentworth determined to try to find the leak, so early that afternoon the yawl was swung over the side by the davits and one of the men got in. A davit pulled from its rotten support and spilled him. During the rescue, the boat swung and lashed against the side, beating and splintering.

Late the next day the *Osprey* was spoken by a banana steamer. The two captains talked through megaphones. Wentworth admitted they were leaking, but declined help. While the talk was going on Grueber was discovered to be about half-way between the two vessels and swimming for the steamer. He was shortly on her deck. Meanwhile Wentworth was demanding his man back.

"Your sailor says you're sinking, but you won't ask for help!" shouted the steamer's Captain. "His story may be true. I don't feel hardly right in leaving you, nor do I feel quite like returning your man."

Wentworth's eyes snapped.

"There's one thing there ain't no doubt about: I'm Captain of the *Osprey*, and so probably able to judge better'n any one else of her condition. As to keeping Grueber, he's a deserter and mutinous, and your helping him is much like piracy!"

Grueber was sent back.

The useless yawl was thrown overboard.

The Captain's next action as to the leak was to have an empty barrel, with its head knocked out, attached to a rope running through a pulley by the side of the bowsprit. He was helped in and the man with the rat mouth and the one with the broken derby stood ready to lower. The Captain remarked coolly:

"It's just as well for you to remember while you're at the rope that I'm the only one on board who knows navigation. Without me your show will be mighty poor for reaching anything but the bottom of the ocean."

He came back looking glum. The men continued to pump and the Captain sat and smoked his pipe.

As the pungent smoke puffed out and floated away, he thought:

"I'm about all in, and I was an old fool to undertake the voyage. The whole bow seems ready to fray out. The old hulk won't keep afloat more than a fortnight, and then'll be all out of her course. The only boat has been smashed. The mate is useless and the crew are mutinous. I don't dare to sleep soundly, as I haven't Crunch to be on the watch against my scum of a crew. If there was no one concerned but them and my old carcass I'd give up the fight. Trefry hired me, however, when no one else wanted an old played-out man, and I told him I'd bring his ship safe into port. If he ever regrets, I'll be either dead or a scoundrel."

III

THE next scene was weeks later, with Trefry in midnight consultation with Morse, a flabby young man with white eyelashes, in Trefry's room at the Hotel San Carlos. Morse was drinking sweet champagne and was scented with musk. The weather was sultry but both windows were closed, and even then Trefry lowered his voice and looked hastily over his shoulder as he talked.

"Why do you have all this gas burning?" said the flabby young man peevishly. "Isn't it stifling enough without that?"

Trefry glanced at the four flames.

"Well, there aren't any shadows."

He wiped his eye-glasses clear of steam, his unprotected eyes meanwhile looking like those of a pig.

Morse reached for an Egyptian cigarette and his companion knocked the long white ashes from a cigar and helped himself to a drink from a cut-glass decanter of whisky. The drink brought a little color, and after shifting about uneasily he blustered out:

"I tell you, Morse, there's no need of your backing and filling about your company paying me the premium. Do you suppose the *Osprey's* going to turn up when she's all this overdue, has been spoke in distress, and part of her only boat has been washed ashore?"

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"You're altogether too certain. I'd like to be convinced that if the money's paid over the *Osprey* won't sail into port and you be out of reach for refunding. What makes you so sure she's been lost?"

Trefry chuckled:

"The *Osprey's* forty years old, and that puts a wooden sailing vessel in her dotage. Seaworthy vessels of that age are as scarce as hills in New Orleans. I felt as sure of what would happen when I sent her off on her voyage as I should if I were to start a man of ninety to run a twenty-five mile race in midsummer, and on top of that arrange to have him sand-bagged on the way. The undertaker would win."

Morse showed a gleam of interest behind his white eyelashes.

"Haven't you felt sorry any time since you did it?"

"Oh, perhaps so, but I'm short. A good many business schemes are just on the line of being illegal, and this isn't so very much worse than some others. How you're contented to plug along on a salary is more than I can see. I like to make money in big wads. I'll clear up about eight thousand dollars with the *Osprey*."

"How do you figure? You can't be, considering that you've spent a good deal for the cargo of molasses."

"I didn't spend so very much," Trefry answered, with a smile which he hid quickly behind his hand. "Maybe you'd like to hear the whole story," he resumed after a pause.

"The Captain who sailed the *Osprey* the last time resigned suddenly, saying he wasn't hiring out to commit suicide and neither was the *Osprey* the particular kind of a coffin he'd set his mind on. I laughed.

"I had the old hulk smartened with paint and fitted with new sails. She looked better, but it no more made her young than it would to paint a hag and give her a showy dress. Then I saw you about the insurance. You'll recall you didn't jump at my proposition."

"What's the use of going over all this?" Morse broke in. "I refused up and down to commit my company to issuing a policy on your old death-trap."

Trefry grinned.

"That's what you did, just as nice and virtuous as a muckraker, but you weakened when I said they were liable to hear at the club about the night Zella threw the vitriol."

Morse winced.

"Tell your story your own way!"

"I wasn't too hard on you," Trefry resumed, "and I had to do business.

"My next job was to hire another captain. Wentworth was in his dotage. Perhaps that made him generous to the age of the *Osprey*.

"You'd laughed yourself sick at the idea of *his* ever going to sea again. He was just about capable of commanding a canal-boat if the day was pleasant and there was a good family horse at the tow-rope. He was all shaky, rheumatic and feeble, and it was about ten minutes before midnight with him, only he didn't know it. I figured he was just about able to get the ship well out on the ocean if the weather held good. I knew he would break down completely if anything happened, and you know something is pretty liable to happen to anything that attempts to round Hatteras at the time of the line storm.

"I told him he looked smart enough for the job, and that I felt perfectly safe in giving him the place, but that perhaps he felt too old. It was a scream to hear him go on after that. According to him he was right there when it came to work to be done. He spoke as confidently as a pugilist before he's going to throw a fight. The old dotard tried to give the impression that he'd be as interested to serve me as though he was trying to help his only son; said I wouldn't regret my confidence in him and would bring the *Osprey* into port if it was the last thing he did. I *was* doing a little worrying—for fear he might drop dead before the *Osprey* got well out to sea.

"He had only a glimpse of his crew. They were a set of bums and thugs, and some of them didn't know enough English to sell hot chestnuts. The mate was a worthless, worn-out chucklehead. I got Grueber into the lot. He's that hairy-chested, lank old grumbler you used to see hanging around my office the week before the *Osprey* sailed. He's a good blacksmith and some of a carpenter, but he don't like to work at those trades—had to learn them or go into the chain-gang.

"I told him to spring some bluff or other to get the whole crew to desert with him in the yawl. He started to talk about the reward he ought to receive. I told him where he fitted was that if he acted real pretty I wouldn't set the police on him before he left,

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but that I surely would do so if he ever came back to New Orleans. That held him.

"HE MAKES a good man for me, for it's the saying down around the docks that he'd kill a man for the price of a bowl of chile con carne. I never tried him on anything bigger than old Wentworth's dog. I didn't want it to trouble the crew if Wentworth should try to cut up nasty at sea.

"Grueber gave it a couple of knocks with a piece of gas-pipe. It was funny how old Wentworth thought of the cur. Why, when I was saying good-by to him on the wharf he was clinging on to the muzzle of his dead dog and told me he was taking it along as a keepsake. His brain must be pretty far gone.

"Another thing I did was to put a small handful of morphin tablets into a gallon of whisky I gave the Captain just before he sailed. I was afraid the red-nosed old dotard would commence to drink it before getting out of the harbor, so I made him promise—and I reckon a promise may mean something to him—that he wouldn't touch a drop of it until it was time to celebrate my birthday. Any day was good enough for my birthday so long as it would give him time to get off Hatteras."

"You don't let much stand in your way when you set out for a thing!" said the flabby young man admiringly.

"Why should I? My conscience won't trouble. Wentworth was so old that he was liable to drop off at any time. It was just as well for him, and a mighty sight better for me, for his finish to come a little sooner by his being lost with the *Osprey*. I *did* expect that the crew would be smart enough to save themselves, but the world is just as well off."

After a pause he concluded exultingly: "Where's there a chance for the scheme to have failed?"

"Oh, you crooks are right smart, but in about all the schemes I've ever heard of there's been some important thing or other left out, or something done a little too cleverly, so that the schemers spend most of their life doing time instead of being bank presidents."

With this Morse lighted another cigarette and took a few puffs. He seemed to be hesitating, and Trefry said:

"You recollect, of course, about the night Zel——"

Perspiration beaded on Morse's forehead.

"Oh, cut that out! Haven't you bludgeoned me enough? You've probably made sure work, and I'll give the word for paying the premium."

Just then there came a knock. It was a boy with a telegram. The message can only be explained by going back to the *Osprey* and the time when Wentworth realized his predicament.

IV

HE WAS trying to think of some way to stop the leak. The bow of the vessel seemed like the head of a thirsty dog, straining to open its jaws to drink. The old man whittled out a model of the hull and about its prow he put a rigging of string, made something like a dog-muzzle. The crew skulked and watched.

Wentworth pulled the string muzzle well over the bow of the model and caught one of the upper cords over the stump of the miniature foremast. He began to tighten the cord by twisting a nail in its slack at the site of the model's capstan. The network harness exerted an even and strong pressure all over the bow. He yawned and turned to Anderson:

"I'm going below for a good sleep. You keep watch; you find it easy to keep awake. At the least thing suspicious you call me."

He reflected tranquilly as he turned in that the mate's having insomnia made him all the better for acting as a watch-dog in place of the dead Crunch.

The next forenoon the forge was being got on deck, while Wentworth measured the lengths of the pieces of string in the muzzle. Next he ordered certain lengths of anchor chain to be cut with cold chisels.

That night Wentworth stood near the lighted forge with the muzzled prow of the model in his hand. He called Grueber to him:

"You see this string model? You can have some men to help and I want you to weld the pieces of anchor-chain together just as these pieces of string join each other. I want a muzzle for the bow of the *Osprey*."

Grueber glared a few seconds without answering, and then spat in disgust. Sud-

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denly he drew close to the Captain and muttered,

"I reckon I can do this if you'll give me the whisky."

Wentworth turned sharply.

"You'll do this because I order it; do you understand that?"

"Hear the fool thing I'm asked to do!" the bully yelled, stepping back.

As his companions gathered around he turned to the Captain and growled:

"What do you think you're going to do if I make this thing for you? Do you think the ship can be patched up to run against the wind? You're so set on having your own way you don't seem to care if you drown us all."

Wentworth's eyes flashed.

"I was hired to take this ship and cargo to Boston. I don't care if I go down in trying and I don't care if all of you go with me. I don't know how long you can remember anything—you can keep your knife in your belt, Pedro—but perhaps some of you recollect that I did some firing at a mark. I wasn't doing it for fun. I had sized you all up and I wanted to be ready for anything that might happen."

As he was speaking he had untied his scarf and had drawn his pistol.

"It might have looked more fancy if I had shot the center out of the ace of clubs at ten paces, but if I never expected to fight anything bigger than that and at that distance I wouldn't waste bullets on it. The mark I took was just the size of the smallest one of the crew, and the smallest outline of him, and the distance I used was the farthest that any man could get from me on the ship. I hit what I was aiming at. I'm willing to show whether I can shoot as well now as I could then."

The crew slunk away.

The welded pieces of chain were intertwined with rope and wrapped around with canvas.

The monster muzzle was shoved forward, lowered and lifted over the bow. A few turns with the capstan drew the contrivance loosely into position. Work at the pumps once more was imperative. Some pumped a while and then all strained at the capstan to fix the muzzle tightly. For half an hour the tugging and straining went on. The scuppers were nearly even with the ocean by the time the harness was tightly fixed. The canvas and the rope gave a clinging grip. The straining seams were closed and thereafter the leak could be controlled.

Wentworth gazed at his repaired ship and thought:

"Crunch has served me perhaps better than if living. If I hadn't been thinking of him and handling over the muzzle it would never have come into my head to do this."

In a glow of good feeling and gratitude to Grueber for his skilful work Wentworth gave him the remainder of the whisky. At the end of thirty hours the bully was dead!

The *Osprey*, for week after week, never making more than five knots an hour, crawled toward Boston.

Wentworth cropped his beard, revealing a firm jaw. His face was a healthy brown. He discarded his cane and walked the deck with a firm tread. He thought, "I'm good for twenty years yet."

Immediately on stepping ashore he telegraphed to Trefry:

Osprey and cargo safe in Boston. Hurrah! Grueber dead.

This was the message which reached Trefry in the time of his triumph. He gazed at the telegram stupidly and at last turned to Morse.

"I must get out of this!" he said thickly.

The flabby young man looked as though relieved of a great fear.

"Of course you don't get your insurance, but why have you got to skip?"

"Because I was so smart!" Trefry snarled. "It's just as you said about we crooks shooting by. I wouldn't be entirely cleaned out if I hadn't cheated on the cargo. Nine hogsheads out of ten contain only water. Can I explain that to the man up in Boston who sent me the money to buy it for him?"

IT WAS two months later, one steamy, soggy morning, on the west coast of Nicaragua, before Trefry knew the particulars of the *Osprey's* voyage. As he grasped detail after detail from the account in a rumpled and dirty copy of a Boston paper he saw how every plan of his had failed, either through luck, his oversmartness, or through his misjudging the character and capacity of Wentworth. From time to time he paused to curse.

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The Wild Man of Santa Cruz

By H. Hesketh Prichard, F.R.G.S.

FIRST of all, contemplate for a moment the scene upon which the events I am about to narrate took place: The Pampas of Patagonia, limitless leagues of harsh grass, of thorn, of granite pebble and of black basaltic rock. Upon the Atlantic rim of these mighty plains a few sheep and cattle farms exist, a few settlements such as Santa Cruz and Gallegos; in the far interior a few Tehuelche Indians lead their nomadic life.

Otherwise the pampas throughout all their enormous extent are given over to bird and beast, and upon them is carried out a perpetual warfare. Huge condors, measuring as much as eleven feet across their wings, hawk-like chimangos and coranchos, pumas, hoary dogs, Magellan wolves, carrion-eaters and creatures of prey exist in almost inconceivable numbers.

Traveling through this country, one is forced to realize the struggle for life. Let the camper leave his bridle upon the ground for the night and all the leathern parts of it will have been devoured by morning. This is the work of the hoary dogs or the Magellan wolves.

But perhaps two experiences of my own will illustrate my point more closely than pages of generalization. Once, when in camp with my comrades in the middle of a very desolate stretch of country, I laid my gun, which had a leather sling, beside me when I turned in for the night. In the morning I awoke to find the gun missing, but soon discovered it at a little distance, all but the leather sling. This had been gnawed off and eaten. As I picked up the gun the culprit, a large Magellan wolf, sprang out from a bush. I slipped in a shot cartridge and advancing to within ten paces, during which time the wolf held his ground, snarling at me, I gave him the charge of No. 4 between the eyes, killing him instantly.

And now my second instance. One day I shot a guanaco weighing about 150 pounds, and, after cutting up the animal, returned to camp for an axe to divide the back-bone. I was not away twenty minutes, but on my return the condors and coranchos had picked the bones and there was nothing left save a few pounds of mangled meat.

From these two instances the reader will understand how easy it is for a murderer to get rid of all trace of his victim upon the pampas. A shot at twilight, a body lying stripped of its clothes, and two hours after

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dawn there will be nothing save a few bones to tell that the deed has been done.

Ascensio Brunel, the wild man of Santa Cruz, was by birth a Swiss, but in very early years his parents emigrated to Argentina, and while still a young man he broke away from them, and with his brother, whom I knew but whose name I forget, worked his way south until he came at last to the Santa Cruz province of Patagonia. Here for some years he and his brother, whom we will call Henri, worked as *peones*, cattle-herding and sheep-tending, but, growing in time weary of the unexciting nature of their calling, at length set up as tamers of horses.

NOW a horse-tamer in Patagonia carries on his business by traveling from *estancia* to *estancia*. When he arrives at a place where the owner has some horses which he wants broken, the tamer camps and remains until he has finished his contract. Argentine horses are usually broken before they are three years old, so that the animals, not having reached their full strength, are fairly easy to deal with.

The method of breaking is simple in the extreme. The colt is lassoed, caught, thrown and saddled, the breaker mounts and gallops it to a stand-still. Then he does it again next day, and the day after, until the horse is quiet, or as quiet as its nature will permit. The tamer is paid by being allowed to keep one horse in ten of those with which he is successful.

This business, then, Ascensio and Henri pursued for a long period. Ascensio was a marvelous rider, and his services and those of his brother were in considerable request all over the south. So some months and even years went by during which many hundreds of animals passed through the hands of the Brunels, and they became the owners of a comparatively large troop of horses. Ascensio, though a savage and merciless rider, never during all this time gave a glimpse of the ferocity which underlay his character.

At length the two brothers happened, in the natural course of their nomadic profession, to come to the *estancia*—this fine word may mean anything from a large residence to a mud hovel with a roof of tin—of a farmer who had recently settled in the country and who was the husband of a very pretty wife, a dark beauty of, it was rumored, a rather uncertain temper.

The farmer gave the brothers a horse-breaking contract and for some weeks all went well. The Brunels seemed to be well-spoken and quiet men—as indeed Henri was—and they made such rapid progress with their work that very soon their contract was nearing its end, when suddenly and with no warning the crime was committed which marked the beginning of the really extraordinary career of him who came to be known far and wide as the "Wild Man of Santa Cruz."

THE START OF AN INFAMOUS CAREER

ONE evening when the farmer, tired from a long day in the saddle, had just come home, Ascensio Brunel entered, and having, it is said, put him off his guard by making some simple little request, murdered him in cold blood.

The actual details of this, Ascensio's first, murder are hard to come by. Henri, whom I met near Ultima Casa, never told the same story twice running, and the only other witness, the wife of the murdered man, passed through some terrible experiences and I never heard her authentic story. The main fact remains:

Ascensio murdered the farmer in order that he might carry off his wife, which he did, besides driving the whole stock, the cattle, sheep and horses of the dead man, into the heart of the wilderness.

Here for a time, the two brothers dwelt with the unhappy woman, until at last Ascensio quarreled with Henri. It was not for the first time, and Henri went to sleep, thinking it would have all passed over in the morning. He was wakened at dawn by a voice shouting to him, and saw at once that during the night Ascensio had driven away all the horses and had also removed the woman.

Ascensio then said he had decided to part company with his brother for good and all; that at first it had been in his mind to kill him in his sleep, but for their mother's sake he had relented. He added that he had shifted the horses and stock to a safe distance, and that if Henri followed he would unhesitatingly shoot him down. He then rode away without more words.

As Henri had neither horse nor weapons he did not follow. Indeed all his efforts were directed toward getting out of the wilderness alive. Living chiefly upon ber-

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ries, he wandered for many days, finally to arrive, an emaciated wreck, at the *estancia* of an Argentine herdsman. The latter tended him and, when he was recovered, gave him sufficient provision to take him to the nearest settlement, where he duly arrived.

Proved innocent of the murder his brother had committed, he went back to the life of a *peon* and shepherd, and so he passes out of this history for good.

THE next act in the drama opens with the arrival in the coast-settlement at Punta Arenas of the woman whom Ascensio had forced to accompany him into the wilderness. She had a frightful tale of cruelty to relate, culminating in a fortunate escape.

It appears that Ascensio had become subject to fits of passion so frightful that they were akin to madness, and indeed madness of a kind had already declared itself in him.

The Tehuelches of Patagonia hold the well-known belief, common to many branches of the Indian race, that when they die they pass to the Happy Hunting Grounds. On the grave of a warrior they slay his dogs and horses; within it they place saddle, knife and food, and for nine nights they kindle great fires, by the light of which the ghost may find his way upon his long dark journey. After that they light no more fires, as they consider that the dead man has had time to finish his journey.

Such is the Tehuelche belief, and in his years of wandering over the pampas there can be no doubt whatever that Ascensio must have been present at the funeral of many an Indian *cacique* and was therefore thoroughly conversant with their tenets.

Whether Ascensio grew deranged suddenly or whether it was a slow and gradual process, no one can ever know, yet the fact remains that he came to believe in the religion of the Indians with some variations and startling effects of his own. Believing, as he did, that death was only a road by which man passed into a longer and more enduring, though not necessarily an eternal life, he conceived the idea of building up a fortune for himself in that future life.

In order to understand his outlook, so far as it may be understood, it must be realized that the Indian heaven is merely an imagination of their earthly existence lived under ideal conditions. In the Happy Hunting Grounds the wind never blows too fiercely, the rain falls gently while the sun still shines, and the animals of the chase are fat and plentiful, and not all the inhabitants of the world, but only those who die in Patagonia, the land of the Tehuelches, can attain it.

In Ascensio's diseased brain there arose the idea that whatever he slew in this world would be his property in the next. On that point he was a maniac; on all others, perfectly sane. Now began the series of thefts which made Brunel's name known from the Rio Negro to the Magellan Straits. One after another he raided the horse farms near the coast, drove away as much of the stock as he could, and, shaking off his pursuers in every instance, escaped into the wildest parts of the pampas.

Here he killed the horses, and the farmers, riding hard on his trail, came time after time upon the bodies of their slaughtered animals. Is it any wonder that the name of Ascensio Brunel was execrated through all Patagonia? One day he would raid an *estancia* near Gallegos; the next he would be eighty miles away. The man was a wonderful rider and what they call in Patagonia *muy baqueano*—that is, having an absolute knowledge of the immense areas that were the scene of his operations.

Over a year passed, and all this time Ascensio was, of course, shut off from the purchase of any necessities. To show his face in a settlement would be to court immediate arrest, followed in all probability by the swift and savage vengeance of the despoiled farmers.

THERE were, however, certain articles that are necessary to life upon the pampas. Of these, matches are the most important, but it was also thought that Ascensio, who was a slave to drinking *maté*, would sooner or later attempt to procure some at one or other of the settlements.

Possibly he would have done so had he not found an easier method. There was at the time a farmer, whom we will name Simpson, living north of Santa Cruz. This man found that it was necessary for him to go to Gallegos and Punta Arenas on business, a journey that occupies about eleven days. The farmer started with provisions for that time and half a dozen horses. Each night, as is the custom of the country, he tied up one horse and turned the others out

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to graze on the harsh grass which grows all over the pampas.

One morning when he woke at dawn, and sat up in his blankets, he saw that the horse which he had tied up overnight was gone. He naturally concluded that the animal had broken away while he slept and was about to start in search of it when, looking out across the pampas, he saw a man riding toward him.

He leaped to his feet at once and shouted to the stranger, who, he had no doubt, would help him to find his strayed horses. But, as the rider approached, Simpson saw that he was dressed from head to foot in the skins of wild beasts and that his long and tangled hair hung down his back like a woman's. To Simpson's questions he returned no answer, but slowly continued to ride in an ever-narrowing circle nearer and nearer.

The uncanny appearance of the solitary man and his continued advance caused Simpson to draw his revolver. Immediately the rider sheered off just out of shot, and then it was that Simpson first suspected what in the light of subsequent events, proved to be correct—that this was Ascensio Brunel, the Wild Man of Santa Cruz. Simpson had been using his provision-bags as a pillow, which was no doubt the reason that the Wild Man had not stolen them when he crept up and cut the horse loose during the night.

Simpson sat down and made his breakfast. And all the time he was eating it he had good opportunity of studying Ascensio, who sat his horse in unbroken silence just out of revolver-range. His saddle, as well as his clothes, was fashioned from the skins of pumas or, as they call them in Argentina, "lions," which he had slain during his long outlawry. While he was breakfasting Simpson reviewed the situation. Obviously the Wild Man had driven off his horses; equally obviously, if he attempted to seek them the Wild Man would prevent his reaching them and, being mounted, was complete master of the situation.

The nearest *estancia* was nearly forty miles away. There was but one thing for Simpson to do—to walk to it. The amount of provisions he had with him was too heavy to carry, so he turned out the greater part of them upon the ground and then, as he limped off down the track, cursing bitterly, he saw the Wild Man ride into his late camp, produce a bag, gather up what he had purposely spilled and then ride away to the west.

Ascensio stopped several travelers in a similar way that year, and those who lived to tell the tale were the lucky ones, for during the long period that the Wild Man was wandering upon the pampas, there were riders who started out but who never returned. It may be that these met with the ordinary accidents common to travel in a wild land, or it may be that the man in the lion-skins crept into their camps, stole their horses and food and left them to die in the wilderness. Certain it is that the fear of Ascensio Brunel lay over the whole of the country. If two men were together they took it in turns to watch, each with his rifle upon his knee, and few cared to sleep out alone in the haunts of the arch-robber.

So things went on, and from time to time the strangest rumors arose—one that the Wild Man wanted wives in the next world and that for this reason he had killed two women in Chubut. This rumor had no foundation in fact, but the people in the lonelier spots lived in dread lest they should hear the hoof-beats of a horse in the night. It took a brave woman in those days to allow her husband to sleep from home.

THE CAPTURE OF THE WILD MAN

SO FOR a long time, for years indeed, Ascensio Brunel, the Wild Man of Santa Cruz, lived his life beyond the reach of the short arm of the Argentine law. *Comasarios* hunted him, various *Jueces de Paz* declaimed about him, and the garrison of cavalry in Chubut "bolted their beef, and started again on the track of the thief." And then suddenly, one morning, the news flew across the countryside that the Wild Man had been captured. It was true. The way of it was as follows:

In the very heart of Patagonia, upon the banks of a river called the Mayo, lived, and indeed still live, a tribe of Tehuelche Indians, the tallest and perhaps the strongest people on earth. They are hunters and horse-breeders, wonderful riders and good men. They worship horsemanship and have a number of strange rites which they practise at the birth of a man-child in order to insure that he shall turn out a good rider.

Into the nature of those rites we need

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not go. They are very cruel. I merely mention them that you may understand what a task the Wild Man set himself when he decided to steal a hundred mares from men such as these peerless riders, trained in every phase of horsemanship, much of whose lives is spent in searching for strayed horses and who can ride a hundred miles a day without fatigue.

It was probably a spirit of bravado, intensified and strengthened by the immunity from capture he had so long enjoyed, that caused the Wild Man to embark upon so perilous an enterprise. I had the whole story from the Indians themselves when I visited them a year or two later. Here it is:

It appears that the herd of mares that Ascensio stole were feeding in a *vega* or marsh that stretches on the southern banks of the Mayo. No one was watching them, and, as they were well used to their pasturage, it seemed unlikely that they would stray. Therefore, when shortly after dawn an Indian lad came galloping to the *toldos* with the news that the mares had disappeared, the men of the tribe were soon on horseback and riding upon their trail.

In a few minutes the experienced eyes of the Indian horsemen told them that the mares had not strayed, since, by the tracks, they were traveling too fast. They had been stolen, or else stampeded by lions. A few minutes more and the lion theory had to be given up, for the mares continued to travel in a close bunch, whereas when stampeded by wild beasts they scatter to every quarter of the compass.

Hard on the trail the Indians rode all day, and before sunset they were aware of a man clad in skins driving the mares before him. Swiftly some of the pursuers closed in on him, while others rode to cut him off by a *cañadon* or rift in the pampas which lay across his path. Had it not been for this *cañadon* the Wild Man would never, in all probability, have been taken.

As it was, he galloped down the sheer wall of it, but only to find himself cut off by the Indians who had been detached from the main body by the *cacique* for the purpose. Riding in upon him the Indians flung their heavy *boleadores*—the Tehuelche weapon of three rawhide thongs, each weighted at the end with a ball of stone—which entangled the legs of the Wild Man's horse and brought it crashing to the ground. On the ground the Indians captured the Wild Man, snarling and biting.

THERE was once a time when the Indians were not the peaceable men they are to-day, and at that time no doubt they would have wreaked their own justice upon the thief. But now the Indians keep the white man's laws in small things and, on this occasion, they proved that they could do so in great also.

They did not slay the Wild Man but bound him upon a horse and conveyed him over three hundred miles of pampas to Gallegos, where they handed him over to the authorities in due form. He was thrown into prison and the Indians departed for their wilderness home once more.

THE ESCAPE AND THE SECOND PURSUIT

IN THE Argentine Republic there is no capital punishment, so that after his trial, the sentence that would be passed upon the Wild Man was certain—penal servitude for life.

But it never came to a trial, for it was not long before the warders of the prison awoke one morning to find their prisoner gone. He had cut his way out through the walls of wood, stolen a horse that had been tied by some late visitor before the door of a house in the main street, ridden through the night until, at dawn, he found himself far out upon the pampas.

All along this belt of country from Gallegos to Santa Cruz are scattered farms set along the coast at frequent intervals. The Wild Man turned north and, on the second day of his escape, caught and stole a horse from one of these farms and so rode on up the coast. While the ordinary traveler dismisses the horse which has borne him gallantly and well with a pat and a kind word, the Wild Man, each time he procured a fresh mount, returned to his tired and weary beast and killed it.

His road from Gallegos to Santa Cruz was marked at every stage by the dead bodies of the horses he had ridden. On and on he rode so fast that pursuit died out behind him; on and on he rode like a man with a purpose. A purpose he had. He never stopped nor wavered, but, leaving Santa Cruz to the east, he turned north and west until he came into the great unpeopled districts, in the center of which dwell the

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Tehuelche Indians, who had captured him.

And then one night, before the Indians had even heard of his escape from jail, once more he raided their mares and drove away a great troop of them. His intention doubtless was to get them to some suitable spot and there kill them, thereby gratifying his own peculiar and bloody-minded beliefs and at the same time revenging himself upon the Indians.

The instant they discovered their loss the Indians rode on the trail of the mares, but this time Ascensio drove them like a madman, as indeed he was. He had a good start and he was a wonderful *gaucho* and horseman, possessing the rare quality of being able to control a herd of horses largely by voice. So he fled west all day, and all day the Indians followed hard.

The sun was already falling toward the West when they spied him at last. He was nearly naked, for he had flung away the clothes which had been supplied to him in the jail, and was mounted upon a gigantic horse. As he rode, he uttered the cry of a lion, and the frenzied and terrified mares galloped wildly in front of him.

But, try as he would, the Indians gained on him, and at last, with a wild shout, he turned from the mares and struck out upon a course of his own. Some of the Indians stayed to round up the recovered animals, but a half-dozen of the best riders among them swung off on the trail of the thief. After a time he altered his course and rode straight toward the sun, which was swiftly sinking like a gigantic red-hot cannon-ball beneath the horizon. Its light, which was of extraordinary brilliance, dazzled the eyes of the riders, one of whom came heavily to the ground, and one remained to tend him while the others swept on.

The sun sank and the chase continued. One by one the Tehuelches dropped away until at last the Wild Man and a single Indian alone remained. Now the moon was in the sky and by its light the Indian saw the Wild Man slacken his pace and, with features convulsed with rage and hate, turn at bay. The Indian grew afraid and paused. They looked at each other for a moment and then the Wild Man laughed aloud and, turning his great yellow horse, rode slowly away to the west, while the Indian returned to his companions, whom he rejoined on the following day.

Such was, in detail, the story that was told me by the Indians and I, not unnaturally I think, was inclined to disbelieve it in its entirety.

To put it shortly, I made no doubt that the story was true up to a point, but I very much suspected that the six Indians had caught the Wild Man and had wreaked their vengeance upon him. I believe those in authority in the coast-towns also favored this edition of the tale; events however, were destined to prove us both absolutely in the wrong.

RUN TO COVER

AND now I must come to my own small part of the story. One day I was riding with one of my companions upon the banks of the river Leona. This river lies due west of Santa Cruz, under the very shadow of the Andes, and it has probably not been visited half a dozen times by men of white race.

We were, as I say, riding along its barren shores, when our attention was drawn to a couple of roughly fashioned paddles which lay upon the bank. They were made of roblé-wood, such as grows upon the neighboring mountain of Frias. As the Teheulches never cross the Leona, and as they know nothing of boats, it was clear to us that we were looking upon the work of a white man. What made it more certain was the fact that no bribe will induce the Indians to enter the region of the cordillera of the Andes because of their rooted belief that the Gualichu—their Devil or God of Evil—dwells in these mountains. The noise of glaciers calving and the shifting of great masses of ice the Indians believe to be the voices of fierce demons, and in my own experience a large offer to accompany me into the "land of the dark trees" was refused.

Therefore we had no reasonable doubt that the paddles had been left there by a white man. But what white man? Only an exploring party or a criminal fleeing from justice would ever dream of entering the land to the west where man had never trod. My companion, a well-known farmer, gave it as his opinion that in the paddles we were looking on the handiwork of the Wild Man. On this we examined them, and both of us agreed that the paddles had been cut from the trees that year.

Was the Wild Man, then, still alive? Was

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the Indians' story, then, indeed true?

My companion was inclined to answer both questions in the affirmative and he advanced a theory which was at least plausible.

"You see," said he, "if the Wild Man did escape, as the Indians say he did, his one idea would be to cross the Andes into Chili, where he would be comparatively safe."

"But," I objected (we were at the time within fifty miles of the Pacific Ocean with only the Andes between), "what good would it do him to escape over the Andes into Chili so far south as this? There are neither cities nor inhabitants. The man would starve."

"Not necessarily. There are the Canoe Indians. He might join one of their tribes and so make his way up the coast into the more settled districts."

That night we slept by the Leona and early in the morning my companion called me and pointed to the great range which towered to the west.

There, high up the slopes of a mighty mountain, against the clear pale-blue sky, a smoke was rising. There was no doubt about it. On that February morning, and on another afterward, some human being did light a fire upon the unexplored slopes of the Andes.

WHEN I returned to the settlements, which I did in the following May, I mentioned the occurrence to one or two residents, all of whom declared that the smoke must have existed only in our imaginations. I was therefore the more interested to receive a letter from Patagonia from my erstwhile comrade. He reiterated his originally-given opinion that the smoke we had seen was lit by the Wild Man and he added the following facts:

Near the cordillera of the Andes an adventurous German settler had squatted with his family, and had built himself a small house or hut. One night the German was awakened by a knocking at the door and opened it to find a man clad in skins facing him.

The man appeared to be emaciated and was certainly of the most extraordinary appearance, his whole face being blackened by an almost continuous growth of hair.

The man demanded food, whereupon the German invited him to enter and, taking a frying-pan, commenced to cook some meat. As he bent over the fire, the Wild Man, with senseless and brutal cruelty, shot him through the back and, helping himself to various provisions, left the house and the dead man lying in it.

The news of this crime and of others, which followed close upon it, aroused the whole district. Neither man nor woman could feel safe while the Wild Man lived, and at last a body of armed settlers ran the criminal to earth in a house which he had entered for purposes of plunder. He never left that house alive but fell on the threshold riddled with bullets, yet not before he had left his mark upon more than one of his assailants.

The exact facts of the period between the Wild Man's escape from the Indians and his reappearance at the house of the German can never be accurately known, but his dress of skins and his long hair and beard make it almost, if not quite certain, that he never found his way into civilized Chili, but spent the interval lurking in the vast forests of the Andes.

For my part, I have very little doubt that the smoke which we saw that morning rising from the slopes of the mountains, arose from the solitary camp-fire of the most menacing character and habitual criminal the Patagonian provinces have yet known. With his distorted beliefs and his wonderful wilderness skill, he set at defiance for long years the Government and the people of vast districts. He had not a friend, nor was there a man in the country who did not long to take his life, nor a house in which he could hope for shelter. The cunning of the madman allied in him to the savagery of the beast, made him the most dangerous creature between the Atlantic and the Pacific, the Colorado and the Straits, and, when at last he paid the penalty of his many crimes, the solitary traveler and the lonely woman all over the country felt that the shadow of great dread had at last passed away.

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The Pirates' Broth

by G. W. Ogden

AFTER forty years of trading on the river, Pierre Leblanc was going to leave it. He had seen its commerce grow from the small boats of adventurers which drifted down out of the Ohio from Pittsburg, to the more dignified traffic of flatboats—"broadhorns," they called them—which had in turn given place to the swifter keel-boats, driven by sails in place of poles when there was wind to drive them.

Forty years of coming and going between New Orleans and St. Louis had made the long way of the Mississippi as familiar to him as a village street, and he loved its solemn shadows and sunlit stretches as men who have lived their lives among them love the gleaming desert wastes.

"But when a man's wife dies," said Pierre, "it's time for him to settle down."

Greater, indeed, than the necessity of most men of his calling was Pierre's duty of becoming a fixture somewhere, according to his view, for in dying his wife had left to his sole charge their daughter, the one pledge of their long union. Not alone the daughter demanded attention. His fortune, growing slowly since the first small cargo of olives and wine and silks which he carried up the river from New Orleans, had become so large that it could no longer be left alone between voyages. It had kept him from the river a good part of the past five years, and with the going of Charlotte he had decided to surrender his freedom entirely to the gold and the girl.

"I'll marry her to some bold man who will make a way for them and their children," said he, "and then, maybe the river again—who knows?"

There were bold men in St. Louis, Pierre knew, and in St. Louis his own widowed sister lived, secure in the fortune which Jean had built in many a perilous voyage among the Indians of the Northwest. And Jean, too, was gone. So there was room and welcome in the widow's house for them, and some business among the bold ones to keep the gold from rusting, as they say, until a bold one should spy out his slim Viola and lift the anchor that held Pierre in port.

There was a new peril on the river which had risen since his last voyage, making it a matter of grave risk for a man to put his whole fortune into one boat and attempt to pass upward to St. Louis. Captain Pedro Cosca, whether upon his own account or that of his king, no man knew, had set up a fort below New Madrid, about halfway between New Orleans and St. Louis, from which he collected tribute from all who passed. He told those whom he robbed that the Mississippi was his king's highway, and that all who passed must pay toll. The flag of Spain waved above his fort, and the king's uniform clothed the nondescript collection of river pirates who had enlisted in his service.

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Owing to his avarice, trade on the river had shrunk to almost nothing in the two years past. For Cosca's toll was heavy, never stopping short of all the money and goods the voyagers carried; not infrequently including their lives as well. Cosca was reported to have thirty men at his command, and a cannon upon his fort. Sometimes those who were well armed and of strong force sailed past him in peace.

So Pierre, gathering hope from that, together with the confidence gained in fighting river pirates and Indians all his turbulent years in the forest, prepared to sail from his old home in New Orleans in his best ten-ton keel-boat, one of the finest of the river fleet.

Pierre gathered a crew from among his old sailing mates, men with whom he had shared many a hard adventure in past days, concealed his money in the planking of the vessel's sides, loaded the boat with a good, sound cargo, put his daughter aboard, and set sail. There were thirty-five aboard, all told, including the cook, a Mexican-negro slave. There were arms for all, and Pierre carried a cannon in his bow which threw a four-pound shot.

From New Orleans to St. Louis by keel-boat was a trip, with all things favorable, requiring not less than three months to accomplish, and as Cosca's situation was a little beyond the half-way point of the journey, Pierre looked forward to the passing of it as the event which would mark the completion of the heavier part of the voyage. After many arduous days and nights of ceaseless vigil they came, one morning at sunrise, in sight of Cosca's fort.

Leblanc was favored by an up-stream wind, which almost invariably stirs on the river at that hour of the day, and he gave the vessel all the sail it would carry, at the same time uncovering the cannon and ordering old Duprée, who had been a gunner under Lafayette, to take aim at the small piece of artillery visible on a mound of earth above the outlaw's breastworks.

"If it winks," said he, "put out its eye!"

But there was no hostile demonstration of any kind from the fort. Several men appeared in a boat at the mouth of a small stream near the fort, making signs that they wanted the vessel to stop and trade, but Leblanc did not shorten sail or reply. In a short time the Spaniard's station was lost to view behind a bend in the river.

"Good," said Louis Rantoul, the sailing-master; "Pedro Cosca has seen the Frenchmen's teeth."

DUSK found the keel-boat at the foot of a small island, where anchor was dropped for the night. Leblanc slept peacefully, relying on the impression his cannon had made, and the miles which he had placed between his cargo and the covetous reach of Don Pedro Cosca. The boatmen slept on deck, their weapons at their sides.

The night was not divided into watches, as at sea. Two men were detailed to stand guard until daybreak, one forward, one aft, and as reward for their services were granted the following day for rest and sleep. And as Leblanc snored in his cabin, David Watkins, working his passage back to St. Louis, kept watch astern, and Simon Dubois sat on a herring-keg in the bow.

The soft plash of a waterfowl, lighting in the river now and then; the tremulous call of an owl from the black forest that rose in mysterious walls on either hand; the plaintive whistle of a snipe among the reeds ashore; the soothing wash of the current along the vessel's sides, were all in that world of woods, with its pathway of dark water, that disturbed the watchers' ears. It was a sleep-inducing night under any conditions, and when a man was tired to the marrow it was irresistible. So, after a while David Watkins slept, his arms flung above his head, his rifle by his side.

Even Simon Dubois, conscientious in the discharge of a duty, shifted to the deck, his back against the keg, and trespassed dangerously near the land of oblivion, shaking himself from time to time to keep his senses clear. It was so dark that he could not see his fellow-sentinel, but Simon believed him to be sitting there, awake and alert. It was a comforting thought, that fidelity on the part of Watkins.

"Well, if I should chance to fall asleep," muttered Simon, "that man David would not, because he is a solid bone and needs no sleep. And then, no foot could fall upon the deck without striking a man. What harm if I should sleep an hour, hey?"

PEDRO COSCA, floating down the river to his station from a visit to the colonel at New Madrid, was called by his excited boatmen between midnight and morning. The outlook in

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the bow of his light craft had seen the keel-boat nestling its prow against the island, dark and quiet. After a careful reconnoiter the pirates boarded her, barefooted and noiseless, moving among the sleeping men, taking away their weapons. One stumbled over Watkins where he stretched in the shadow.

"Is that you, Simon?" called Watkins, starting to his feet.

Then, seeing the unusual activity on deck, and surmising the cause, he shouted a loud alarm. Four men sprang toward him as the sleeping crew awoke, groping for their arms. A few swift blows with his assailants, who crowded him to the rail, a stroke across the cheek from a cutlass and the blood pouring down his face like hot water pressed from a sponge, satisfied Watkins that the battle was against him. He dived into the river, coming up out of sight in the darkness below. The pirates, masters of the vessel, drove the crew forward, and Cosca commanded his men to bring the occupants of the cabin before him.

Leblanc had remained in his cabin against his will through the turmoil following Watkins's alarm. The negro cook, when he saw how matters stood, hurried to his master's cabin, armed himself with Leblanc's weapons and took his stand outside the door.

"The thieves have boarded us and are in charge of the deck now," he replied to Leblanc's frantic inquiries, "but Louis will drive them into the river as soon as he finds his head. You couldn't help matters by going on deck, and they'd surely kill you the moment you appeared there. Stay here and help me defend the young mistress."

In spite of Leblanc's commands, he held the door and would not let him pass. The men who went to take the owner of the vessel before Cosca were furiously assailed by the negro, who drove them back with his cutlass.

Cosca snatched a torch from a fellow's hand as they appeared on deck.

"Come with me," said he, "if you are not cowards indeed!" Pistol in hand, he approached the cabin door. The negro cried out in Spanish a command to halt, and Cosca bent forward, looking at him closely. "What?" said he; "Victor?"

At the sound of the pirate's voice the negro lowered his weapon, gazing into Cosca's face, illumined under the blazing pine torch.

"Señor Pedro," he cried, "I did not hope to ever hear your voice again! I can not strike you, Señor Pedro, I can not strike you!"

"Who is it that you guard so well here?" asked Cosca.

"Pierre Leblanc," the negro answered, "a poor old coward, who may be dead of fear already, for all I know."

"Better luck with a better master!" laughed Cosca. "Go on deck and wait my orders!"

Cosca pushed open the cabin door and found Leblanc holding his daughter by the hand. The blazing knot showed the old man's face white with a wild, savage anger, but fear was not reflected there. He struck the torch from Cosca's hand and reached for the cutlass that Victor had dropped. Cosca placed his foot upon the weapon and a follower swung the torch to rekindle the flame.

"Stand back!" commanded Leblanc. "You shall not touch my child while I live!"

"Tie him," Cosca ordered, "and take both of them on deck!"

Morning was advancing when they dragged the old man on deck, his hands bound behind his back. There Leblanc saw the negro slave merry with the boat's captors. The pirates had tied the boat's captain and crew, like cattle at a fair, to a long cable, their hands behind their backs. The negro, as if intoxicated by liberty, was capering and grimacing before them mockingly, their efforts to kick him and his nimble evasions supplying great sport for the victorious freebooters.

"One favor, Pedro Cosca," appealed the old merchant. "Before you take my life place a knife in my hand long enough for me to cut out the tongue of yonder black traitor!"

Cosca laughed.

"I shall not take your life, Señor Leblanc," said he. "Neither could I permit such cruelty as you propose. Victor is an old friend—indeed, in happier days he was my father's slave. He will assure you that I am a gentleman. I have brought you to the deck so that you may see with your own eyes that I am master here. If you will promise me that you will do yourself no violence, I will permit you to retire again to the cabin."

"If money can buy my daughter's safety," pleaded Leblanc, "name any amount

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within my means, or the means of my friends. It shall be paid."

"We shall consider terms when we reach my fort," Cosca answered. "In the meantime, rest without fear." He cut the rope which bound the old man's wrists, and Pierre led his daughter away.

THE pirates turned the vessel downstream, and toward noonday poled the craft up the small creek at the confluence of which their fort stood, and put the prisoners ashore. The crew was confined in a stout corral, or stockade, made of logs set on end in the earth, a defense against Indians to be used in emergency. They were left bound, and armed guards were set over them. Leblanc and his daughter were taken to Cosca's log house outside the stockade. Cosca put aside all attempts at negotiations for that day, begging the merchant to make himself easy.

"Rest," said he, in all that shallow courtesy of the Spanish tongue, which can be so easily slurred into insolence, "and compose your soul. When you are yourself again we shall speak of this."

Next morning he appeared before Leblanc, smiling and assuring.

"It is of your men that I would speak," said he.

"I have no money to buy their lives," said Leblanc. "You must deal with them. If they had kept awake I never should have been trapped in this way."

"But they eat a great deal, a great deal every day," said Cosca. "You understand that this becomes a burden on a poor man?"

"But you will not murder them because they eat? Set them free, man, set them free!"

Cosca turned away, still smiling. A few hours later he returned, his demeanor entirely changed.

"You carried gold when you left New Orleans," said he shortly; "what have you done with it? My men have searched your cargo, but have found no gold. If you want to buy your lives, now is the time to begin business with me."

Leblanc had reason, aside from his natural desire to save, if possible, the result of his life's labors, for denying that he carried gold. He knew that the discovery of its hiding-place would not stay the outlaw's hands, nor alter in the least his intention toward his prisoners.

"You are wrong about the gold," said he. "I carried only merchandise."

"Very well, old rat," said Cosca, "I will give you until noon to-morrow to wean yourself away from the love of this gold, and then if you do not tell me where you have it hidden, I shall begin tearing the vessel apart. This course I shall dislike very much, because it is a good vessel and worth money, and you may be certain that for every board that comes off its ribs I shall twist a groan from you. If you will tell me now where you have hidden this money, you may pack your crew into your vessel and sail away in peace."

"Even if there is gold, your promise is not a guarantee," answered Leblanc. "But there is no gold."

"I have given you until to-morrow noon," said Cosca, "and if it were not that I am a man of honor, I should withdraw that. As it is, let it stand, and to-morrow at noon I shall burn the flesh from your breast with a rod of iron, just over your lying old heart, and your daughter shall stand by to smell the smoke of your frying!"

He went out, and the sentry locked and barred the heavy door.

"Tell him, tell him!" begged the girl, clinging to the old man's hand. "Send for him and tell him, on promise that he will set all of us free."

"His promise would be worth nothing, child; and once Cosca has the gold he will be quick to remove proof that it was not always his. Unless we can escape before noon to-morrow he will surely torture me as he has threatened, and even then if I tell him where the gold is hidden he will let me live no longer than to verify my word. I have a thread of hope because that black man, Victor, has not told them. He alone, of all the crew, helped Louis and me to store it away. Louis, I fear, they have slain before this, but if he lives no threat can tear the secret from him.

"But what cheers me most of all," he whispered, "is this; this morning I saw a sign on the bottom of the loaf they brought us that told me Victor baked it, and that a friend is at hand. I do not know what he means by that, for one man could do nothing among all these wolves, but he must have some plan. Even if they kill me, he may be able to plead and intercede for you."

Leblanc knew that there was no hope of assistance from the outside. They were in

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a portion of the country where the settler had not yet penetrated, surrounded by leagues of wild forest. Even the Indians seldom visited that section, and it was a journey of weeks northward to the place where the first ripple of civilization broke the solitude of nature.

Victor had been assigned, by virtue of his former standing in the Cosca household, as cook to the camp, with permission to come and go as he desired, the pirate Captain's confidence in him being secure.

So it chanced that the negro, searching the forest for herbs, stumbled upon David Watkins, who sprang upon him fiercely, grisly and terrible with a great wound in his face. He menaced the negro with a club, threatening his life if he raised an alarm.

Watkins, from his spying on the camp, seeing the negro come and go, believed him to be a traitor. But he soon was convinced of Victor's loyalty, and at night the negro supplied him with food and arms, unfolding to him a plan for the deliverance of the captives, which he hoped to carry out the following night.

Watkins was to creep as near as possible to the stockade in which the crew was confined, and await the signal of a shot, when he was to rush out and batter down the gate of the pen with an ax which Victor had given him. Failing in that, he was to fling the ax over to Louis, with whom Victor had also communicated.

The following evening the negro delayed supper until the men were famishing, his desire being to bring the meal as near nightfall as possible. They cursed him and hurried him, but his excuse was that the venison soup was not ready. When darkness began to fall, the cook served his soup to the men at their table in the open, torches flaring along the rude board.

They were a surly outfit at the best, and that night they plunged their hairy faces into their bowls with few words, each man so intent upon his own business that he had no time or inclination to note the doings of his neighbors.

And so when some of them began to sink over in uncouth heaps, their shoulders on the table, the others did not lift their heads to inquire the cause. At last a hulking fellow lurched from his bench and, in falling, struck one who sat at the bottom of the table.

IT CHANCED that the man at the bottom of the table had come late to his meal and had only begun to gulp his supper. When the stricken one plunged against him he looked up, to see his messmates leaning forward in grotesque attitudes, or stretched upon the ground beside the table. A moment before, Victor had carried a bowl of the soup into the Captain's room, and was in the act of ladling a portion of it into Cosca's plate when the man from the table staggered in.

"Poison!" he cried. "Don't eat it, Captain. Poison, poison!"

He reeled into the room, falling at the Captain's feet. Cosca snatched a pistol from his belt, but, before he could fire, the negro dashed the ladleful of scalding liquid into his face. Cosca, blinded and furious, shot wildly at him. Victor, seizing a rifle which stood near, put an end to the pirate Captain's suffering and rushed into the open.

Watkins, lurking in the shadow of the undergrowth twenty yards from the stockade gate, sprang from his concealment when he heard the firing and ran toward his comrades' prison, to find the two sentries on duty already in front of the gate. They fired at him at five yards, but, in the excitement and darkness, missed. Before they could reload, Watkins, with better aim, had dropped one of them, and Victor, running up from the cabin, accounted for the other. They released the men, and Victor led them to the pirates' arsenal, where they armed themselves.

Louis and his men were amazed to find the remainder of the piratical gang apparently asleep over their supper. But they did not wake when kicked and thrown upon the ground.

"What is this?" asked Louis. "Are they dead?"

"No, they are not dead," said Victor; "they will wake up again in a little while."

To make sure of them they were securely bound and flung like logs upon the ground.

Leblanc came forward to thank his preservers.

"Thank him," said Watkins, pointing to the negro. "If it hadn't been for him they'd 'a' butchered all of you in the mornin'."

He told them, then, how the negro had ranged the woods in search of a rare narcotic herb until he had gathered enough to 'fla-

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vor" his soup, and how he had intended to attempt to carry out the plot alone when he ran upon Watkins.

"Cosca himself will never wake again," said Watkins, "but most of his men are merely asleep of the soup."

Leblanc took the negro by the hand.

"Witness this, my comrades," said he, in the extravagant way of his nation, "that from this time this man is free. He is my brother from this hour, and he shall finish his life in freedom and plenty."

After a night's rest the crew refreighted the keel-boat, blew up the breastworks, pulled down the stockade and burned the cabins. There was a considerable store of plunder which Cosca had not disposed of, and this was loaded into a flatboat as the prize of the crew. Pierre then called his men before him on the keel-boat's deck.

"Concerning these pirates," he announced, "I have been much troubled in mind, and I have found it hard to come to a decision regarding their punishment. In my own mind there is no doubt as to what they deserve, and I halt only because I am an old man whose soul is already weighted to the safety-line with sin. My child has begged for their lives. I do not tell you this to affect any decision you may reach in the matter, for I turn them over to you. You, my comrades, are to judge these men, and in your judgment lies their fate."

The conference which followed was grave and long. At sundown the punishment of the pirates was announced to Leblanc by his Captain and crew. The sentence was that they should be loaded into one of the flatboats which Cosca had plundered in some past raid, supplied with rations out of their own stores, and set adrift down the river. They were to be allowed nothing offensive or defensive save two axes with which to cut their fuel.

"And so we are merciful men, you see, my daughter," said Leblanc.

And for their mercy she thanked the crew, who turned away, smiling when they met one another's eyes.

As darkness fell, the Frenchmen began rolling barrels and kegs into the flatboat's hold, not trusting the river pirates to assist. And in the hold stood Louis, the sailing master, staving in each cask with an ax, and from the burst staves flowed not streams of flour and provisions, but something black, that looked like nothing in the world so much as powder. When the flatboat, its bound crew battened in below, was pushed adrift in the swift current a little later, a tiny red light glowed in intermittent flashes and sparkles upon its deck. It looked very much indeed like the light of a fuse.

After a few silent minutes there came a flash which seemed to lift the forest and river out of the obscurity of night into the blaze of noon. And then a roar, sullen, dull-echoing, breaking and rolling through the trembling trees.

"What?" questioned Leblanc, turning a puzzled face upon his crew, "What?"

"It must have been the wickedness of their souls that consumed them," said Louis, looking gravely down the dark river.

"Yes," said Leblanc, his dry face wrinkling in a smile, "I have heard of such things in my day."

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The PARLOF RUBY

by John Kemble

THE room was close and stuffy and even darker than the narrow ill-lighted passage had been, and for a moment or two I stood irresolutely on the threshold, debating as to whether I should enter or turn back while there was yet time to beat a safe retreat. I could hear my heart thumping against my ribs, for there was something distinctly uncanny about this silent and apparently deserted house, standing, as it did, in one of the most secluded and out-of-the-way streets in London; and while I can truthfully say that under normal conditions my nerves are of the best, I must also admit that I have never been entirely proof against the gruesomeness of mere surroundings.

Whether I should have turned and ignominiously fled, had another moment of silence followed, I can not say, for just as my eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness, and the outlines of the room were beginning to reveal their squalid bareness, I heard a slight cough, coming, it almost seemed, from my very elbow and, turning, with an abruptness that may be easily imagined, I beheld a man seated at a small table in the extreme right-hand corner.

As far as I was able to judge from a quick and startled glance, he was much above the average height, his long legs being sprawled out beneath the table with a careless abandon that did not escape me even in my momentary surprise. Before I could change my position his voice broke in,

"Well, aren't you going to join me?"

It was said with such refreshing candor and in accents that were so clearly refined that I could not but heave a sigh of relief.

"I don't wonder at your surprise," he continued, sweeping the apartment with his hand. "This room is scarcely what I could wish it to be, and yet, believe me, in the present instance it will suit our requirements nicely, for"—he shrugged his shoulders and rose to his feet—"we can unhesitatingly bank upon being left quite to ourselves, and in a city like London the

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value of privacy is not to be underestimated."

He proceeded to draw another chair from the wall, and with a hospitable gesture bade me be seated. I sank down in grateful silence, and watched him go slowly over to the door by which I had entered; without a word he closed and locked it, then, returning, flung the key down before me. The stub of a candle burning in its dilapidated stick wavered for a moment and almost went out.

"A mere precaution, unnecessary perhaps, and yet one that can do no harm," he said by way of apology. "If you have any reason to doubt my motives, keep the key yourself. I don't want you to feel in any way a prisoner."

My first impulse was to reach out and obtain possession of it, but on second thought I decided to let it remain on the table.

"Good!" he murmured, "you have decided to trust me. Trust begets trust, and after all,"—he smiled a broad indulgent smile, while his eyes glittered ominously an instant across the rough-hewn board—"you must be aware of the fact that had I meditated anything in the way of personal violence I need not have wasted time locking doors."

"Exactly," I rejoined as coolly as possible. "And I am also aware of the fact that you could have no earthly reason for wishing me harm."

"Good again!" he cried. "I see that you're a philosopher. There must be a motive for everything—even knavery—eh? Though few thinkers have gone so far as to catalogue criminal motives. My dear Gregory,"—I started to hear him use my name so readily—"if the same amount of brain work that is put into law-making for the punishment of crime were turned into a study of first causes I'm inclined to think that our jails would be less thickly populated. However, that's not our affair. To pass from moralizing to business, you received a letter this morning? Of course! Why else should you be here?"

I drew a crumpled envelope from an inner pocket and spread it upon my knee.

"You need not trouble to read it aloud. I'm quite familiar with its contents. As you have, no doubt, inferred, I wrote it, or rather typewrote it, which amounts to the same thing and saves risks, especially when one's handwriting is as obvious as mine."

For the fiftieth time that day I read those few lines:

> If Mr. George Gregory, late of Jansen & Burnes, will come to No. ——, Darley Row, at eight to-night, he may learn something to his advantage.

It had puzzled me from the moment of its reception, and my face must have shown it, for he broke in with a laugh.

"Doesn't explain much, does it?"

"In that respect I call it decidedly dumb," I muttered, replacing it in my pocket, "but I hope you will enlighten me."

His lips came together with a nervous twitch, and he moved forward convulsively in his chair.

"I dare say I shall be able to accommodate you, but first let me ask you a few questions. Has any one else seen that note?"

"And to whom, pray, would I show it?" I responded.

"Ah, that's the question," he snapped out. "You're alone, quite alone and without friends in London?"

I smiled. If he only knew what the last few weeks had made of me, if he could have seen me tramping the streets with barely enough in my pocket to pay for a night's lodging! Friends! The thought was pathetically ridiculous.

"At the present moment," my words came slowly, "I have just threepence to my name. Does that sound as though I were an influential Londoner burdened with generous-hearted friends?"

He must have noticed a note of bitterness in my voice, for his face softened and for a full moment he sat looking at the wall beyond me, his fingers playing a tattoo on the table. In the meantime I had an opportunity to study him more closely.

HE MUST have stood six feet in his stockings, and his shoulders were broad and square. A slight scar running from his left eye down upon the cheek gave a sort of desperate expression to as boyish and frank a countenance as it has ever been my good fortune to see. His eyes were of a grayish blue and the hair dark and close-cropped. On the whole his appearance was far from displeasing.

Just as I began to think he had forgotten my presence, he turned like a flash and

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was up and around by my side in the winking of an eye.

"This is a queer world, but you've found a friend at last!" he cried. And then, as if ashamed of having exhibited so much emotion, he added, with just the trace of a sneer, "That is, if you are prepared to turn about and play the same by me."

This sudden change in his manner confused me somewhat, and I did not know exactly what to say. My reply was a halting one.

"But you know nothing about me!" I stammered.

"Come, that's good!" He stood looking down upon me, his shoulders squared, his hands thrust deep into his pockets. "Why, I know about all there is to know concerning your past history. As for the present—well, you yourself have given me an inkling of that."

"But how?"

I was beginning to feel a little uneasy. Those gray eyes were reading me through and through.

"Oh, don't be afraid. I know nothing to your discredit, saving your presence in this dirty hole; and I brought you here, so I'm not apt to hold that out against you."

I was hopelessly at sea; his every word only deepened the mystery. Why had he sent for me? Who and what was he?

"All this doesn't let in much light for you, does it? Well, be patient and all shall be as clear as day. Let me see—" he took out his watch and consulted it by the feeble rays of the candle—"it's now eight minutes after eight. We have a good half-hour yet."

"Half hour for what?"

My curiosity was getting the better of me. Here I was in a semi-deserted house, talking with a man whom I had never seen before in my life, whose name might be Smith, Brown or Jones for aught I knew; and he, instead of explaining the situation, was taking it as a matter of course. Paying no attention to my question, he pulled a paper from his pocket and, spreading it out on the table before him, began to consult it closely.

"You," he began, "are George Gregory, and up to two weeks ago were in the employ of Jansen & Burnes, the Piccadilly jewelers. Saturday night, February the 14th, you were called into Jansen's private office and told that your services would no longer be required; no reason for your discharge was given. You had been in every way a faithful assistant, and your knowledge of precious stones, especially diamonds and rubies, should have made you invaluable to a firm doing a large business along those lines."

"However, there was a reason," I interrupted.

"I'm coming to that," he pursued. "Of course, there was a reason. As you remarked a while ago, there is always a reason, though it is seldom in evidence. Being, as I have said, an enthusiast on the subject of jewels, you had no difficulty one day in recognizing a stone that passed through your hands to be reset as the famous Parlof Ruby."

"Aye, and who would not recognize it!" I burst out. "Was its like ever known before?"

"Its like was not only never known before," he replied, "but the world will never see its equal again! But to continue: Even the novice in the history of these matters knows, or should know, that the ruby was a gift of the great Cardinal Richelieu to the royal house of Merilia, whose Prince served him so faithfully at the siege of La Rochelle. And the stone has been one of the most treasured possessions of that family since the early part of the eighteenth century—a crown jewel in fact."

"That's what bothered me!" I said, growing interested. "There could not be two such gems in the world, and yet——"

"And yet you were told by Mr. Jansen that such was the case, and when you tried to argue the matter with him, succeeded only in arousing his anger."

His knowledge of the matter was marvelous. I did not conceal my astonishment.

"Never mind how I know," he smiled; "perhaps I was there. It is sufficient for our purposes that I do know, and that I am here to act upon that knowledge."

"And I?" A glimmer of my position was beginning to dawn upon me.

"You, I hope, will aid me in recovering the missing jewel—for it is missing!"

My astonishment was increasing rather than diminishing.

"Then you must be in the service of the Merilian Government." I went on. "A detective!"

He drew himself up like a flash, and I could almost hear his breath as it escaped from between his teeth.

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"Detectives detect crime!" was his angry reply. "I prevent it! There is a vast distinction. The man who hounds his fellow creatures for the sake of flinging them behind prison bars is a common spy. I fight in the open, on the same ground, with the same weapons, the odds always even!" He turned away with a shrug of contempt.

Here was certainly an unusual way of looking at things, and yet his point was simple enough. I found myself wondering that I had never regarded the matter in that light before.

"Well," I rejoined finally, seeking to change the subject, "if the Parlof ruby is missing from the crown of Merilia it is certainly in the possession of Messrs. Jansen & Burnes, for I have seen it."

"Right again!" He clapped his hands. "What a quick wit you have! But you must remember that it is not generally supposed to be missing."

"But we know better!"

"Just so, we know better, you and I, and the Merilian Government knows more than we do. It knows who removed the jewel!"

"It does?" I broke forth. "Then what——"

He stopped me with a quick gesture.

"That's not our affair. There are the best of reasons, no doubt, for wishing the culprits' identity to remain unknown. All that is required of us is the ruby, and that's where my business begins and leaves off."

"Then the thief will go unpunished?" My ideas of justice were being rudely handled.

"As for that—why not?" came the cool rejoinder. "In three days, no more no less, the stone will be back in the crown at the aforesaid court—so where's the crime?" The man's assurance was overwhelming, and my protest was a weak one.

"But how in the world are we going to get it? Will the police assist?"

"The police are more apt to get in our way than to assist us. That is, if we use them the way they are generally used. Look here!" He leaned across the table. "Are you willing to run the risk of imprisonment, or do you want to back water while there's yet time?"

My answer was quick and abrupt. I was in a mood for a desperate chance.

"I've nothing to risk," I said, and tossed the worn threepenny piece into the middle of the table, where I saw it roll about for a moment and then come to a stop by my companion's left hand.

"Heads we win!" he cried. "I will keep this for luck. And now, since you have made your decision, we'll come to business."

AS I look back upon it all now I wonder at my ready faith in the man. He had not even told me his name. I can see him now as he sat opposite me, his dark hair tumbling over his brow, his pencil busy jotting down the bits of detail he gleaned from my answers. Every now and then he would pause and run his hand over his head in a restless, fevered sort of way, while his piercing eyes were forever roaming about the room, and his fingers continually beating time on the table between us.

When he had said that I was an enthusiastic lover of jewels he had put the case mildly. From boyhood it had been a passion of mine, and the strange lore of those mysteriously wrought gems that, from time immemorial, have been both a curse and a blessing to their possessors, had tinged my whole life with its romance. I had recognized the Parlof ruby the moment my eyes had fallen upon it and, knowing its history, had been naturally curious to learn how it had come into the hands of the London trade.

Foul play had never crossed my mind. Stones of a like magnitude had been stolen in the past, but the risk was so great, the danger so pronounced, the possibility of selling so slight, that it had been many a year since such a coup had been attempted. And Jansen & Burnes, while by no means the largest house in London, were, nevertheless, Court jewelers. What did it all mean? Strive as I might, I could make nothing of it, and yet from what I had heard in the last half-hour there had been knavery somewhere.

At last he flung his pencil into a corner, and, leaning, back in his chair, beamed good-humoredly in my direction.

"That's about all I can think of now in the way of questions," he said, "but wait a minute; how about the combination of the safe? You were never entrusted with that, I hope?"

"No, I never was, but I should have thought some information on that score would have pleased you." I could see no

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reason why he should hope I knew nothing about it.

"If you had known the combination, would it not have been changed the day of your dismissal? That is generally the procedure in such cases, is it not?"

"Why, of course!" I answered, somewhat flustered. "I was forgetting that part of it."

"It doesn't pay to forget anything, my dear Gregory; that's the first thing an investigator of any kind should learn. But come now, there is still ten minutes to spare," he went on, consulting his timepiece, "and it's your turn, so fire away. Your face tells me that you are wild with curiosity, and I don't wonder. Your confidence in me—it may have been misplaced for all you know—deserves a like reward from my hands, but be quick! Minutes are not hours."

I was about to speak when he interrupted me again.

"You'd better have a handle to call me by. My mother's name was Bentham. Strangely enough it has always seemed good enough for me."

"Bentham," I ejaculated. "Why, that's an old Devonshire name."

"No doubt," he broke in. "I haven't much interest in family history and you must curb yours to-night.

"Well, to begin with," I said, swallowing his rebuke, "what I want to know is how and why you chanced to light on me?"

"That's simple," he answered, pulling a small pipe from his pocket and carefully lighting it over the flame. "After giving me so much inside information concerning our friends Jansen & Burnes and their interesting little store, I wonder at your question. You were the one man who could tell me certain necessary things, and my sending for you was no chance. I spent a good three days looking you up!"

"But how did you know I would prove so ready an informer?" I was beginning to be ashamed of my apparent simplicity, and I wanted him to know it.

"My dear fellow, every man is glad to benefit himself, but of course I couldn't be sure of our matching things so smoothly. There's more or less risk in everything, you know. That's what makes life interesting."

"And you ran the risk?"

"If you want to call it such, yes; but I happened to learn the other day that a certain firm of jewelers had discovered the loss of one or two trifles soon after the discharge of a certain clerk."

"It's a lie!" I burst out indignantly. "I never took anything in my life that did not belong to me!"

"Oh, for that matter, I didn't say that you had," he went on easily, "but I'm not a bigoted stickler when it comes to drawing the lines of mine and thine, and of course any criminal slur against your character would not tend to add value to any revelation you might see fit to make later concerning the Parlof ruby. Taking your innocence for granted, believe me, I judge that to have been the motive of Messrs. Jansen & Burnes when they preferred the charge. The main point is, you are wanted by Scotland Yard! Knowing this, I felt sure that I might be of some service to you in return for any little assistance you might find it in your heart to render me."

"But it's shameful!" I cried, maddened by the thought of being branded a criminal. "I'll go back and fight the charges. They can prove nothing—absolutely nothing!"

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," was his contemptuous reply. "I could prove that black is white if I were prepared to spread a few bank-notes over the colors, and Jansen & Burnes are his Majesty's jewelers, while you—well you have confessed to me that your only friend in London is this three-penny piece, and I have taken that for luck."

"I see!" I moaned. "My word wouldn't stand for a moment against theirs."

"But don't let that trouble you," he continued. "We're not going to walk into the arms of Scotland Yard. On the contrary, we're going to bilk them, and bilk them nicely."

"Bilk them?" I stammered.

"Exactly," was his cool reply, "for tomorrow we are going to ride out of London with the Parlof ruby, and, what's best of all, no one is going to follow us!"

The room was reeling before me and I saw only the clear-cut features of Bentham as he sat puffing away at his pipe as unconcernedly as though he had been enjoying a cigarette in the lobby of the Cecil.

"Well, if I were to tell you all the ins and outs of this little game we are playing it would take half the night, and we have only four minutes left us now. Suffice it

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to say that it is, in every way, a royal affair," he concluded, "quite between a prince, badly in need of money, and a firm of none too scrupulous jewelers willing to negotiate it quietly."

MY MIND had been working rapidly for the last few minutes, and I began to see the vague outlines of the whole plot. The identity of the prince badly in need of money was not difficult to conjecture. Had his escapades not been the scandal of all Europe? And who else could have had access to the crown jewels? I had come so far; I would see the adventure through, for turning back meant Scotland Yard, and Scotland Yard meant disgrace, and, well, I was ready for any sort of a wild-goose venture by the time he had reached the door and unlocked it.

"And now, if you have no objections," his voice came from the passageway, "we will shake the dust of this suburban villa from our clothes and go our separate ways. But first," he came back again and closed the door, "let's thoroughly understand each other before we take another step. In a few moments it will be too late to turn back. If you have had enough, now is your opportunity to draw out. I never want you to say that you were forced into this. If you come, it must be of your own free will, to bear all the consequences and share and take alike.

"You have learned enough," his eyes narrowed until just the faintest gleam escaped from between the lashes, "to give you a slight idea of the nature of the work. It has its risks, but, as we have observed before, so has everything else, and in this case they seem to me to be exceedingly small. But of course," his voice dropped into a lower register, and he came a little closer, "you may think differently when I tell you that to get this jewel in time for the coronation ceremonies we shall, in all probability, have to break and enter. In other words, commit burglary!"

I started, but I had had my suspicions, and to my shame his confirmation of them aroused no moral disgust.

"Go on," I whispered.

"And if we are detected, we shall have to face the law!"

He must have noticed a queer expression on my face, for he broke into a sudden grin, and reaching over rested one hand gently on my coat-sleeve.

"But don't be worried, old chap; there won't be much danger in it for you, and as for conscience, if you are bothered with that bugbear, ease your mind with the thought that we are only re-obtaining by diplomatic means that which in no way belongs to its present holders."

I assured him that I was quite prepared to stand by the consequences, and added, somewhat bitterly, that beggars and their ilk could not be choosers.

"But you are not a beggar!" he cried, thrusting a five-pound note into my hand. "You didn't think me base enough to pump you dry and then turn you out unpaid, did you?"

I looked at the note he held forth and a lump came into my throat. It was more money than I had seen for some time.

"Here, take it!" he broke in. "I can see that you have no stomach for this sort of thing, and I don't blame you; it isn't the sort of business most men would choose, and you are wise, perhaps, to keep out of it."

"But you forget," I said, ignoring the note, "that I am already under police ban."

"Nothing of the sort!" he went on quickly. "After what will happen to-night I doubt if anything will be pushed. I only wanted to test your caliber."

"Then I shall owe my immunity to you, and I know of no better way of expressing my gratitude than by seeing this affair through."

"Spoken like a man!" he snapped out, replacing the note in his pocket, "but as for being in my debt, that's all rubbish; it's the other way around. And yet if you do cast your lot in with mine, you can still be of service to me, and I assure you that it will mean much more than a five-pound note."

"As for that," I murmured, "money is not the only spring that moves me. Justice is a stronger one!"

He had me by the hand before I had finished speaking, and with such a grip! My fingers ache now at the thought of it.

"My good Gregory, you are a trump! I knew it the moment my eyes rested on you. One man in a thousand—that's what you are—and by the dome of St. Paul's you shall never regret enlisting with Dick Bentham! Sink or swim I will see you to the shore,

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but as for justice," his voice became rich with sarcasm, "if the whole world fails in meting that out, we had better not build hopes in that direction ourselves."

THESE quick changes in the man were beginning to startle me. As time went on, it was ordained that I should see and come into touch with his inner motives as perhaps no other person ever has, but at the time of which I now write I was but dimly conscious of hidden depths. It is enough to say that I admired and trusted him almost at once as I had never believed it possible one person could trust another. And here, possibly, lies the chief secret of Bentham's success. I never saw a man yet who did not feel almost at sight a complete confidence in all that he said or did.

It must be admitted that my situation was a hopeless one, being penniless and without friends in a city the size of London. But from the moment he took my hand in that firm, almost crushing grasp, and I felt the warm pressure of a friendly palm once more, the die was cast, and I would not have turned my back upon it had I been give a thousand chances.

I watched him blow out the spluttering candle and then followed him through the gloomy passageway out into the street, which ended like a blind alley some five doors down.

To my surprise a hansom cab was drawn up almost at the door, and as the cabby jumped from his box and touched his cap upon catching sight of Bentham, I was left to infer that he had been waiting for us, but I was certain he had not been there upon my first coming.

Motioning me into the cab, Bentham stopped and whispered a few words into the Jehu's ear before following me. It was a cold, dark night in early March, and a heavy, damp fog shut in the surrounding country like a pall. I had never been so far south in London before, and I could not but smile to myself as I contrasted the method of leaving with the circumstances of my coming. I had trudged most of the way on foot after having spent my last shilling on a ticket to Walworth Road Station, and now here I was returning comfortably ensconced in a Metropolitan cab with a man by my side who seemed loaded with five pound-notes.

Verily, life is full of contrasts!

I could see the lights of Waterloo Station looming up ahead before my companion broke the silence.

"I am going to leave you here," he said, "and you are to drive on to the Raneleigh Hotel, Piccadilly West, and engage a suite of rooms on the front. Here's that note you scorned a little while back. I have paid the cabby, so that ought to hold you until I rejoin you."

"And when will that be?" I asked, pocketing the note.

"At ten o'clock. It's just nine now. That will give me a good hour. Wait a minute!" he said as the cab drew up to the station, "Be sure you have a roaring fire lighted in the rooms, for I may be chilled to the bone. We will have a late dinner together, for I have not had a bite since early morning. And now I must send a few wires and do a little telephoning, so good-by until ten."

With this parting shot he was off, and I was left to my own reflections as the cab turned into Westminster Road and made for the Bridge.

II

THERE was a sudden turn to the situation. I had not had the slightest idea that I was to be left alone in this fashion. There were a dozen questions that I had been trying to find an opportunity to ask. How were we to attempt the robbery? How could we succeed with a watchman constantly in the store? And the burglar alarm! In all his questions he had made no query about it and I had neglected to speak of it myself. How should we overcome an obstacle like that, even if we could gain access to the shop? And the safe. He had hoped I had never been entrusted with the combination, so he could not have wished to know it. Was he an expert cracksman, then? He would have to be to open the massive doors that guarded the ruby. But, expert as he might be, could such a thing be accomplished in a lighted store, on a principal thoroughfare always patrolled by the police?

A hundred points that my mind had been groping over during the ride swept, with an incessant clamoring, into my consciousness, and the effect was as of cold water being suddenly pitched upon my head.

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Here I was, quite by myself, free to put any sort of construction on Bentham's conduct that I chose, and the only excuse he had offered was that he wished to telephone and send a few wires. Could he not have done all that from the hotel, or if he had wanted the despatches sent from Waterloo could he not have asked me to wait? The sending of a few messages would not have taken four minutes. No, it was plain that he wished to be rid of me, but why?

As the cab began to rumble over the bridge, I could see the yellow mist of the city looming in the distance, and knew that in the space of a very few minutes I should be stopping in front of the Raneleigh in Piccadilly West. Just then it flashed upon my mind that this hotel faced the shop of Jansen & Burnes, and for a moment my face burned at the thought. That was the reason he had chosen the Raneleigh!

I began to wonder that I had listened for an instant to the scheme, for it was nothing less than foolhardy, and all the romantic story of the jewel seemed to have lost its plausibility now that the streets of London closed in on me. By the time we had turned into Whitehall and were crossing the Mall into Kemp Street I was firmly convinced that I had thrown in my lot with a madman.

I had half a mind to stop the cab and ship the matter where it stood, but then I felt the five-pound note in my pocket and remembered that I had still the commission of engaging the rooms to execute. The cab stopped and I saw that we had reached our destination. A boy came running out to open the door and, assuming as important an air as possible under the circumstances, I stepped out and strode before him into the office. There were perhaps a dozen men lounging about, reading and smoking, but no one gave me more than a cursory glance.

I stood before the smirking clerk with a pen between my fingers before I realized that Bentham had said nothing as to what name I should engage the room under. The sweat stood out on my brow! Why the deuce had I not thought of this before! I knew that I must sign something, for the piercing eyes of the clerk were upon me. And so, with trembling hand, I wrote down the first name that came into my head. It happened to be John Cressington. In quick haste I added "and brother," explaining as the book was swung around that my brother would join me a little later with the luggage, but that I wished to engage adjoining rooms on the front.

In another moment I was following the same shock-headed boy who had jumped for my cab door, up a winding pair of stairs dimly lighted by a flaming lamp. The Raneleigh boasted of no lifts or such modern conveniences as electric lights. He finally stopped before a door, and turning the key in the lock motioned me to enter. One gas-jet was on and I could see from a quick survey of the room that it had two windows overlooking the street.

When I had bolted the door and lighted the other jet I looked into the mirror that hung suspended by a gold cord over the mantel. The picture that presented itself to my gaze was far from reassuring. For three days I had gone without a shave, my hair was rumpled and matted, my gray suit, in its palmiest days fashionable enough, but now sadly out of press, was stained and muddy, and my whole appearance was more suggestive of a street loafer than of a man who could afford to call for one of the most expensive suites in a Piccadilly hotel.

With a grunt of disgust I turned from the glass, and made up my mind to remedy my looks as quickly as possible, and to as great an extent as a five-pound note would allow. An old clock in the corner struck nine-thirty, and feeling in my pocket to make sure that I had not lost the precious five, I made my way back to the office and located the nearest barber shop.

SOME fifteen minutes later I emerged in a much more brushed and respectable shape and took up a position near the entrance for, while sitting in the barber's chair, it had occurred to me that should Bentham return in my absence he would be quite at a loss to discover my whereabouts. "John Cressington" would mean nothing to him.

There remained but one thing to do, and that was to sit where I could command a full view of every one entering the hotel. My zest in the matter had returned and I felt an inward confidence in the certainty of his coming. Before beginning my watch I bought a cigar at the stand and tipped the hall-boy for the sake of preserving my

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new-found dignity. It acted like a charm and, from the smile that broke out on his freckled visage, I was led to believe that he would have been satisfied with much less. However, he became so subservient to my every want that I soon forgot the episode and, settling back in a large chair which the boy drew up to the window for me, lighted a fragrant Havana and enjoyed my first cigar in many weeks. It had a soothing effect on my nerves, and everything assumed a different complexion in the clouds that drifted up.

Now and again the front door would swing open and a belated traveler would straggle in, but ten o'clock came and passed, and no Bentham. I was beginning to feel a bit anxious when, chancing to look out, I saw a small crowd gathering before the doors of Jansen & Burnes!

I started to my feet involuntarily, and the whole force of the situation flashed over me. I had almost forgotten our mission in the luxury of the smoke.

Going closer to the window, I had no difficulty in commanding an unobstructed view of the street. Three officers were parading up and down on the farther side, and their beat was from one door of the shop to the other, and no farther!

What could it mean?

A chill began to creep up and down my spine. Had Bentham made the attempt alone, and had he been discovered and captured? Even as I looked, the lights went up rapidly in the store, and, straining my eyes, I could see that the night watchman was unbarring the front door. As he did so, an automobile swept up to the curb and out stepped Sir Richard Jansen, of all men!

I recognized his tall majestic figure the moment I saw it, and the dark gray tweed suit such as he always wore. Holding my breath, I watched a second figure follow him. It was Carton, the confidential clerk. A third man—it must have been a man from Scotland Yard—spoke a few words to the officer at the door. Carton was visibly excited and seemed to be rubbing his hands nervously together, talking volubly all the while. In another moment they had crossed the threshold and some one began to pull down the green shades in the windows to keep out the curious gaze of the crowd, and I could see no more.

I had seen quite enough to convince me that our game had been discovered or was off, and it amounted to the same thing. Regardless of consequences I reached the door and rushed into the street. The hall-boy followed me, evidently as eager to learn the meaning of this nocturnal disturbance, for he needed only a word from me to dart into the crowd and ply everybody with questions. I waited for him on the far curb, and noticed that the throng about the shop was increasing every moment in spite of the earnest efforts of the officers to keep the people moving.

It was not long before the boy rejoined me. He appeared as anxious to unburden his mind as I was to discover the reason of all the excitement. I managed to gather from his disjointed sentences that it was thought no robbery had taken place, but that the police suspected that some sort of an attempt was to have been made that night.

He confided to me in an awed whisper that a well-known criminal had been spotted in the vicinity—one whose reputation for daring and audacious thefts was almost a by-word, and it was to prevent any bold stroke of his that these precautions were being taken. This, you may well believe, brought more chills to the region of my spine and, dropping a shilling into the hand of the boy, I quickly beat a retreat to the Raneleigh. The noose was certainly narrowing. The one thing for me to do was to get out of its way as quickly as I could.

If Bentham had only kept his promise and reached the hotel at ten, as he said he would! If I could only warn him! I stopped on the top step and glanced carefully up and down the street. There was no sign of him. At least, he had not been captured yet. That was small comfort though, for there was no telling what might be going on behind those closed doors. Perhaps they were discovering traces of any preparations he might have made. He might have cut the wires of the alarm system. The main door of the shop opened suddenly and Sir Richard came out and, with a quick nod to the chauffeur, jumped into the car and was off up the street.

It seemed as though a thousand eyes were on me as I passed into the lobby and swept by the clerk, acknowledging his bow without looking up. I was mentally going over Bentham's chances of escape and what would be the best course for me to pursue. The stairs seemed endless and the hall an

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interminable gallery. I remember stopping by a window, which must have opened upon an alley, and mopping my brow. It was far from being a warm night, but every drop of blood in my veins seemed to be on fire and I leaned out into the fog, tempted to end it all by throwing myself upon the stones below.

III

WHEN I finally reached the door, my hand trembled so violently that it was only after a supreme effort that I managed to insert the key in the lock. In entering, I should immediately have stumbled back over the threshold or given vent to a shout of surprise had I not exerted a great deal of control, for there, in a chair before me, his feet cocked up on the center-table, and a large traveling-bag lying in the corner, sat Bentham, that same old smile of indulgence on his face!

"Come in and close the door; it's drafty out there. You must have left that window open." Noticing the bewildered as well as frightened look I must have borne, he burst into laughter. "You look as though you had seen a phantom! I'm an hour late, but that's nothing when you take into consideration the amount of ground I have covered and the hustling I have done since we last met. I have ordered a little supper sent up here, and while we eat we can talk and formulate our plans. They are about complete now."

"Plans!" I shouted, stepping to the windows. "Do you know what's going on over there? Heavens, man, the street is full of police!"

"Street's full of police, is it?" he remarked coolly, giving the fender a kick and setting the coals to burning briskly in the grate. "Well, what's that got to do with us?"

"You will know well enough in a minute!" I snapped back. His absolute indifference was appalling when one considered that every moment was precious.

"Then fire away and tell me. You ought to know all about it; you seemed interested enough down in the street there to have learned about everything worth knowing; though," he smiled again, "you need not shout about it, for I am not the least bit deaf, you know."

"If you are not deaf you are mad!" I cried, my nerves getting the better of me.

"Oh, I don't know about that, either," he drawled. "If we were to be judged by our actions and speech just now, any just jury would find you the excited party, I'm thinking." Observing my perturbation, he suddenly dropped his bantering tone and said, seriously enough, "Wait until our supper comes up and then we can talk things over. Your story for mine."

Before he had finished, a knock came upon the door, and I was starting to my feet from the bed upon which I had sunk, when he placed one finger to his lips and, rising, opened it, admitting a servant with a tray of smoking food. I was certainly relieved to see only a waiter, and, after all, what was the use of getting excited? The worst would soon be over, and Bentham was here. He seemed to be taking it easy enough, and the old confidence in him came back to me—that very confidence he seemed to carry everywhere with him—in the very air.

I watched the waiter pull out the marble-topped table, and I almost forgot, for a moment, the guardians of the law a stone's throw across the street. Finally the waiter went out and the door closed behind him. Bentham still stood at the table smoothing out the linen and putting the finishing touches to it. After he had taken the cover from one large dish, revealing a broiled chicken, he turned to me, and drawing up a chair for himself motioned me to sit opposite. I did so with as good grace as was possible under the circumstances. It seemed foolhardy to eat in the face of danger, but I was certainly famished, and my next meal might not be so well chosen.

"Ah, a shave improves your looks, Gregory. I'm glad you thought it worth while to prepare for our supper."

"How in the deuce did you find your way to this room?" said I, unable to curb my curiosity.

"That was simplicity itself," he answered, taking a wing of the chicken and attacking it with gusto. "I knew you would have sense enough to register under an assumed name, and John Cressington was the only obvious and unnaturally cramped signature on the page. Besides, 'and brother' was an inspiration."

"I am glad you think so," I said. "And then, of course, the clerk gave you another key."

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"Right, old man, and, by the way, I rather like the name you have given me. Cressington—it sounds respectable."

The chicken was choking me in spite of my hunger—I tossed my fork down and turned away from the table.

"Hang it, how can you eat when all this hubbub is going on across the way! I am neither hardened nor insane, and this sitting coolly here is nothing less than——"

"Sensible, my dear chap," he broke in. "Come, collect yourself, and let's hear your version of this thrilling adventure."

As briefly as possible I related what I had learned. He listened without a word until I had finished, although from time to time he indulged in a chuckle.

"It not only means that we are in great danger," I concluded, "but that your little business with Jansen & Burnes is off—spoiled by some slip. You have been spotted!"

"As far as Jansen & Burnes go, I suppose it *is* all up," he responded, with a twinkle in his eye, "for we couldn't very well break through a line of London bobbies, could we?"

"I should say not!" I cried. "But that's not the worst of it. They have got wind of the whole business, and are no doubt on our track at this very minute. How they learned, or who——"

"Easy again. I told them, or rather 'phoned them, to look out for us to-night!" he broke in.

"You 'phoned them!" There was no doubt now about his being a madman. I fairly shook with terror.

"Precisely," he went on. "That was part of the game. You are not used to my methods yet. Complications——"

"Complications!" I howled. "Good heavens, man, are you crazy?"

"No; but I will wager that our mutual friends Jansen & Burnes will be when they discover the truth." He rose from the table and glanced at the clock. "Sir Richard ought to be here by this time; his cab ought to be out front now."

I was on the point of going to the window when he grasped my arm.

"Now that wouldn't be wise, would it, to show yourself? You forget Sir Richard knows you."

"What's he back again for?" I muttered, ashamed of my haste.

"Back again?" Bentham smiled. "This is his first trip."

"First trip!" It was my turn to sneer now. "He was here an hour ago."

Instead of showing astonishment as I expected him to, he burst into more laughter.

"Well, well, I suppose I shall have to explain matters to you, but first tell me what you think of this case for our jewel when we get it."

In his hand was a small, green box with gold clasps and a monogram cover. As I came to his side he lifted the lid, and there, there on the white plush lay a sparkling stone! Everything disappeared in a golden mist that swam before my eyes except that jewel—scintillating, brilliant, blood-like, it filled my whole vision and, wonder of wonders—there was no deceiving my practised eye—it was the Parlof Ruby!

I CAME to myself just as Bentham was shutting the case and replacing it in his bag. On the floor lay a gray coat and trousers, a tall hat, a wig and a false beard. Even as I looked, spellbound, he gather them all together and threw them upon the blazing coals of the fire. I sank into a chair, gasping for breath. Bentham watched the flames leaping up the chimney for a moment, and then, taking a pipe from his pocket, proceeded to fill it carefully from a rubber pouch. The only sound in the room came from the crackling grate, and Bentham had his pipe lighted and had puffed away at it for some time before he ventured to speak.

"Things look perfectly clear to you now, don't they?" he began, seating himself in a large rocker and stretching his legs out before him in a lazy fashion.

"Clear?" said I, completely dazed. "Far from it, but you must have made a master stroke!"

"'Master stroke' nothing!" he muttered savagely. "It was child's play! It involved the sending of a few messages, the use of a little make-up, and the purchasing of a few articles of wearing apparel, that's all. Listen and see for yourself how simple it was with the details before you.

"In the first place, it's funny you never remarked upon my resemblance to Sir Richard. The scheme found its inception there, and from the moment I realized that it was possible to impersonate him successfully I had very little doubt as to the final

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outcome, though I did have to devote some considerable time to investigating and perfecting details. You thought I intended to break into the store in the conventional way of the professional crook. My dear fellow, I don't mind admitting that my ability in that direction is sufficiently developed to have accomplished my purposes in such a manner, but it would have been a crude method, lacking all the elements of the picturesque, and there's little enough color in life.

"It's almost our bounden duty to add to it, whenever we can, by doing the unexpected. Do you remember the questions I put to you earlier in the evening? Didn't some of them strike you as strange, or suggest a peculiar course of procedure? For instance, my interest in Carton, the confidential clerk. Of what use would a knowledge of his duties and habits be to a man who contemplated a midnight burglary? Really, Gregory, you have better wits than you make use of generally. Everything I asked you plainly indicated that I intended to utilize every one connected with the establishment that I could. Beginning with you, it was scarcely probable that I should end there. Carton was the pivot, the essential cog, we might almost say, for he alone, besides the proprietors, knew the combination of the safe.

"So when I left you at Waterloo Station I immediately got into communication with him, advising that esteemed gentleman to be in instant readiness to accompany me to the store as soon as I arrived at his house. I next wired Sir Richard at Criklewood, telling him that a plot had been unearthed to steal the Parlof ruby, and that he had best come into town at once. To this despatch I took the liberty of signing the name of Burnes, having ascertained that that honored member of the firm was some fifty miles north of London at his country home. I then 'phoned Clackens of Scotland Yard, asking him to have the Piccadilly store patrolled and await the coming of Sir Richard for further orders.

"That much done, the way began to look clear. I therefore donned my disguise, jumped into a taxi-cab and called for Carton, who was waiting for me on his front steps, as nervous as a hare, which was the precise condition I had counted on finding him in. And, by the way, should you ever need some one you can bend to your will safely, select the most excitable individual you can lay your hands on; for invariably such a person will be too busy keeping a rein upon himself to indulge in much critical inspection of you or your purposes.

"I knew Carton was my man the first time I saw him at the store, over a week ago, and he lived up to my highest expectations. All I had to tell him was that I suspected the shop had been or was going to be robbed. After that he went so far up into the air that I don't believe he has come down yet. When we stopped for Clackens he nearly had a fit, and what he neglected to say about you was a caution."

"About me? Why on earth should he introduce my name?"

"That brings me to the part where I owe you the most profound apologies," replied Bentham soberly. "It was inevitable. You had already been made a scape-goat, you know, and it was wiser to build upon a reputation already established than to go to the trouble of finding a new one. So, as a matter of fact, I told him that I suspected you of having learned the combination of the safe while you were with us, and of having parted with it after your discharge."

"And how could such an insinuation have helped you?" I answered, not exactly angry, but considerably ruffled.

"Why, it was the only excuse I needed to offer either Carton or Clackens for the opening of the safe. I told them the combination must be changed at once, and they agreed with me. Now, to change the combination, you have to open the doors of the safe, don't you?"

"And Carton actually opened the safe for you and changed the combination?" I gasped.

"Of course he did," went on Bentham, with a contemptuous curl of his lip. "Most men of his caliber do what they are told to do if they are told properly. He went about it as if it was the most natural thing in the world to do, and while he regulated the change of the combination, Clackens and I inspected the interior of the safe, taking our time, too.

"I had no difficulty in locating the secret compartment where the gem was hidden, after your precise directions, and I gave our friend the Inspector a good look at the

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ruby—let him hold it in his hand, in fact. He admired it greatly, though he confessed he was no judge of jewels, and thoroughly understood our fears in regard to its safety. When he returned the stone to me I simply palmed it and replaced a substitute in the cleverly concealed drawer. The rest was a walk-over. I strolled out of the store, while Carton was trying to put things straight with the burglar-alarm people, re-entered the waiting taxi, changed back to my natural self behind the drawn shades as we sped up the street, and what else was there left to do but quietly drop out of the cab and come here?"

It was impossible to express my admiration. His reply was a short laugh, and he was busy over a Dover time-table that had appeared in his hands as if by magic.

"My dear boy," he exclaimed, looking up, "when you have seen as much of life as I have, you will understand that success is won by only a third of the world through the stupidity of the other two-thirds. Now the only risks I ran to-night, speaking broadly, were justified by such a conviction."

"But Carton might have refused to open the safe," I ventured, wishing to make up for my lack of sagacity in the beginning by a show of expert criticism at the conclusion.

"Yes, but not to change the combination," was Bentham's quick reply. "Every careful concern does that immediately upon suspecting that it may have been learned. That's why I hoped you had never been entrusted with it; it would have been changed as soon as your dismissal occurred in such a case."

"Suppose it had been a time-lock?" I went on in the same vein.

"If coronation day were not so near, I almost wish it had been," was his surprising reply. "I have made quite a study of time-locks. They are not nearly as invulnerable as people imagine. Some day I hope to offer you a proof to that effect, but," he shrugged his shoulders listlessly, "not one jeweler's shop in a thousand uses anything of the kind! You know that."

"One more question and I am done," said I.

"Fire away!" he laughed.

"Sir Richard himself might have come and spoiled it all; why did you telegraph him?"

"To be quite candid, I sent for him to put a little zest into the affair; it was bound to be infernally tame, anyway. You see, there was just a chance that he might have caught the 9:30 train from Criklewood or motored in, and arrived while I was at the store. That would have given an amusing turn to the situation—made a sort of comedy of errors. I wonder which one of us would have carried off the honors and established his identity first?"

"My money on you!" said I, in all sincerity. "From this time on, I back no other entries."

"Thanks!" he yawned. "It may sound egotistical, but I think I *should* have given Sir Richard a bad half-hour, at least. And now," looking sleepily toward the bed, "seeing that we have got to catch the 7:40 train for Dover in the morning, I move that we turn in."

"But is—is—it quite safe?" I objected. "As soon as they discover the loss of the jewel they will begin their hunt."

"No, I think not," he responded lazily. "And besides, if they're anxious to recover the jewel they will know exactly where to look for it."

"What!" I cried, jumping to my feet, a cold shiver running down my back.

"Well, you see, I thought it no more than right, after having left a rather poor substitute in the secret drawer, to leave a little card, in the way of explanation, behind with the bogus ruby. I have no doubt Sir Richard has read it by now. It was the twin of this one."

A small square of pasteboard sailed through the air and dropped at my feet. Bentham smiled as I read it.

Coronation Ceremonies
Bokona, Merilia
Admit
Jansen & Burnes

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A Giant to the Rescue

by Charles Wesley Sanders

AS HE had left the north slip, the air had been clear and the stars had shone brightly. In the darkness under the big bridge he had felt a puff of scarcely perceptible moisture in his face. Beyond the bridge he paused on the dock to look along the river to the lake. The puff in his face had been the advance-guard of fog.

He took half a dozen steps forward and then he stopped. The fog had rushed in on him like a velvet-footed foe, and he was shut in from the world.

"Let me see," he said, "the river's to the left, ain't it? I don't want to fall into the drink."

Acting on this calculation, he groped his way to the right and presently came into contact with the brick wall of the low-lying building from which the dock extended. He leaned against this and figured.

"This is Spring Street, and Leary's place is on River. Erie, Huron and Lake—three streets in between. I better get up the hill and go round."

Following the wall, he at length got himself turned up the hill. He was almost running into the lamp-post before he caught the flicker of the gas above. He turned north then and knew that he was headed for his destination. He came presently to another gas-light, a second and then a third. He swung round the corner to descend the hill to Leary's, when he came breast to breast with a man who was ascending. Instinctively they gripped each other's forearms. Each found the other's as hard as steel.

"All right, neighbor," said the first man; "I guess there's no harm done."

At the sound of the voice the second man gripped a little harder. The first man seemed to think the pressure friendly and he replied in kind. Then they released their holds.

"I was lookin' for Leary's place," the first man said. "It's hereabouts, ain't it?"

"I just came from there," the second man said. "I'll pilot you back."

"No need to. I can find my way."

"I guess I'll turn back anyhow. It's too foggy to go far."

They went down the hill together. Without hesitation, like one who knows his way, the second man strode along the dock, the first at his heels, till they came to a saloon door. This the second man threw wide and bade the first enter. As the door closed upon them, the half-dozen men at the bar put down their glasses without noise. A game of cards at a table at the side of the room stopped abruptly. Then some one spoke:

"——, if *he* doesn't get what he goes after!"

The second man scowled and shook his head vehemently. The noise of the bar-room began where it had been suspended. The second man walked to the bar.

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"What're you going to drink?" he asked.

They drank whisky and then the first man said,

"My name's John Pelty. I'm a deep-water sailor. Never been on the lakes before in my life. But I'm going on them now. Want to quit roving and quiet down. Been all over, wherever a ship can touch. I'm looking for Oscar Lawler, mate of the *Quilling*. He said I might find him here. Sailed over the world with him before he come inland and settled down."

"My name's Keegan—Dan Keegan," said the second man. I'm a fisherman out of this port. The *Quilling* sailed this morning, bound up. She'll not be back for ten days at least. She's bringing grain down."

"I'll have to wait, then," the first man said patiently. "Sit down and we'll have another drink." And to the bartender, "Let all the boys in—you, too."

While he waited for his drink, his eyes roved the bar-room. They were merry, kindly, big, blue eyes; and they were set in a big, broad, red face, with a wide mouth and a nose so large that it would have disfigured almost any other man. There was a stubble of red beard on his lip and jaws, and when he took off his soft hat he showed another closely clipped stubble on his head. As Keegan had seen, he was six feet six inches tall, weighed two hundred and fifty pounds and had a chest like a stallion. And his arm was like a capstan-bar.

Keegan was counted a big man along the river front, but Pelty dwarfed him, though Keegan had his six feet, his two hundred pounds and his thews.

For some reason, the eyes of the bar-room were upon the two men as they sat drinking at their table. Those whom Keegan could not see stared openly; those whom he could see made subterfuges to get glimpses. And there were whisperings and winkings and noddings.

"Why don't Keegan start something?"

That, with the assertion that Keegan got what he went after, showed that somehow he was foe to Pelty, though apparently Pelty didn't know it. At first the hangers-on waited with some tenseness for the beginning of what Keegan was expected to do. But an hour and then two went by and the men only sat and talked—rather Pelty talked—of many things and many lands and Keegan watched him with his evil, dark eyes and smiled a twisted smile now and then with his thin lips. At length Pelty rose.

"I must be going," he said. "Good-night!"

He opened the door without a backward glance and the fog took him. There was silence, and then the bartender, who took liberties none other would dare to take, asked,

"Why didn't you start something, Dan?"

Dan Keegan turned those evil eyes on the bartender as one who would say,

"How can a fool like you go on livin'?"

II

EVERY man jack of them that frequented Leary's place and the other places that opened on the docks knew what occasioned Keegan's animosity toward Pelty. Keegan, in his cups, had let the story out. He cursed his man and swore to "get him." None doubted, then, that he would.

As Keegan had told Pelty, he was a fisherman out of that port. Mornings he went out on the tug of whose crew he was a part; evenings he came home with the day's catch. Nights he spent in Leary's, or else he went over the railroad bridge to the little house under the hill where Kate Murphy lived with her father and her brother. Her father was up the lakes on his boat most of the time and the brother was a longshoreman who was home to eat and to sleep and no more. So that Kate was alone whenever Keegan chose to come to see her.

He had been going to see her for nearly a year now, and no other wooer had crossed her threshold. That was the fear they held Keegan in. It was not that he was braver than another, but they knew he was unscrupulous. He would stop at nothing. He "got what he went after." He was exceedingly handy with a knife, and he had served a workhouse term for stabbing a sailor who had refused him chewing tobacco.

Therefore when he told over the bar how a stranger had appeared in the under-the-hill colony and had gone to board next door to the Murphys; how he had met Kate and had instantly made up to her, and how Kate had permitted him to call on her, the crowd pleasurably pricked up its ears. Fights had been few lately. This, should it be started, might be a good one.

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"You guys all know Kate's mine," Keegan boasted, and he let his dark gaze travel over them. "She's mine, because I want her to be mine. I guess that's enough. This guy likely don't know me!" He struck his chest. "I'm goin' to make myself a committee of one to let him know. And when I let him know, I'll let him know in a way that he won't forget. Believe me?"

They believed him.

"I haven't seen him," Keegan went on, "but I've heard his voice. I'll know him by that. I went to see Kate and as I opened the front door I heard her talking to somebody. Then this guy comes back with a lot of soft stuff. Kate tells him she can't listen on account of me. He says he ain't afraid of any man that lives. She says, 'Oh, but you don't know *him*.' I guess he don't, does he?"

In a day or so somebody had a glimpse of the stranger; then some one else. Described by these two, he became known at Leary's before he had set foot in the place. The hangers-on waited for the meeting which was inevitable between him and Keegan.

And that is why there had been expectancy in Leary's place when the two came in out of the fog. And Keegan's failure to make good explains why in the course of the next week John Pelty became one of the most popular men along the river and why the influence of Dan Keegan—he had never been popular—began to wane.

From the night of the fog the situation was changed. Every night Dan Keegan sat at table in Leary's or hung over the bar. Every night John Pelty wooed Kate Murphy. Only the bartender had nerve enough to twit Keegan, for Keegan sometimes had to stand this gentleman off for drinks and couldn't afford to offend.

"Why don't you go to see your girl?" the bartender would ask; and the hangers-on, finding that Keegan was man, not devil, once in a while covertly smiled.

But Keegan would only drain his glass and scowl evilly. He seemed to be trying to puzzle something out.

AT LAST he rose one night, with the twisted smile almost expansive, and went out into the dark. Through the window he could see Kate and Pelty sitting in the dining-room. It was warm and Pelty had his coat off. Kate was darning her father's and her brother's socks and Pelty was staring at her dark bent head, smiling foolishly and making a remark now and then which Keegan supposed was equally foolish. Keegan ground his teeth before he rapped. His twisted smile was in play when Kate opened the door.

"Oh—ah!" Kate breathed, and backed against the wall, the knob still in her hand.

Pelty heard the exclamation and came hastening out. "Why, it's Keegan!" he said.

He looked from the man standing on the door-step to the girl leaning against the wall, her hand over her heart, her head fallen till her chin almost touched her breast.

"What d'ye want here?" John Pelty said roughly.

The girl lifted her head quickly and stared queerly at Keegan. Keegan permitted himself one glance at her tall, slim beauty, and he swallowed something that leaped to his throat. He had struck fear into this girl's heart, and he knew she lifted her head like that in the hope that he was afraid. But he had decided on his play.

"I just wanted to see you two for a minute," he said meekly. "There's something I want an understanding about."

Pelty took half a step forward.

"Understanding about?" he repeated roughly. "I don't know as we got anything to explain to you. I heard about you since I seen you at Leary's and I don't think much of your style!"

"Kate has told you something?" Keegan asked, with a flicker of hate in his eyes.

"I said I heard about you," Pelty replied loyally. "That's enough for you without bringing Kate into it."

"All right. But I'd like to talk to you two for just a couple of minutes if I can."

Pelty looked at the girl and she nodded breathlessly.

"Come on in, then," Pelty said.

The girl drew herself flat against the wall as he passed her, to make sure he would not touch her. The two men went into the dining-room, and the girl followed them. The men sat on opposite sides of the table and the girl dropped down near Pelty, so that he was between her and Keegan.

"What is it?" Pelty asked, and his voice was again like the fog-horn.

"You know, or I s'pose you know, that Kate and I been in each other's company a good deal lately, the last year," Keegan began.

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"So I heard," Pelty said dryly. "I wondered about a girl like her doin' that."

"Can't you leave off that rough stuff?" Keegan asked with some asperity.

Pelty's laugh boomed through the room.

"I just wondered whether it was all over between me and Kate," Keegan said.

Pelty shoved back his chair, so that Kate could see Keegan.

"Answer him, Kate," Pelty said.

The girl's eyes were on the floor. She lifted them slowly to Pelty's face. Then, waveringly, she brought them to bear on Keegan's black eyes. She had to catch her breath between her parted lips before she could whisper,

"It's all over."

Keegan stirred in his chair and his teeth clicked together.

"That's all I wanted to know," he said. "I just wanted to make sure. Everybody knows that you been coming here, Pelty; and there's talk along the river——"

Pelty slammed his big hand down upon the table.

"What talk?" he demanded with a ferocity that convulsed his usually pleasant face.

"Oh, not about you or about Kate. Just talk that I have been cut out—that I had lost my girl."

"You tell 'em along the docks that the first man that says anything about this girl will get —— choked out of him—like that." The big man slowly contracted his fingers till his fist was a knot of bone and muscle. Keegan got up.

"I'll tell 'em," he said. "And now that it's all over, Pelty, let's be friends. You beat me to it and I ain't got no kick comin'."

Pelty rose and took the extended hand.

"Why, sure," he said. "I'd rather be friends than enemies with any man any time, if he wants it that way."

Keegan held his hand out to the girl. She put hers limply in it, and he turned and hastened through the front room and out the door. The girl, her breath coming fast, turned to Pelty.

"Don't you believe a word he says!" she exclaimed. "He's lyin'! I can see it in his eyes. He's got some scheme cooked up to get you, John."

Pelty laughed.

"Aw, he can't hurt me," he said easily. "Let's be friends with him if we can. What's the use havin' trouble all the time? You've been scared of him without any reason. Say, you goin' to marry me soon as I get a berth, now?"

"Why, certainly," said Kate.

Keegan saw the tableau through the dining-room window. His thin, twisted lips spat curses all the way to Leary's.

III

PELTY staggered across the railroad bridge and down the road leading to the house under the hill. His big right hand clasped his left forearm. The coat-sleeve, covering this, was stained with blood, and blood trickled through his fingers. When he reached Kate's home he banged his right elbow against the door till he heard her coming. She stood aghast for an instant and then she seized him by his good arm and drew him into the house.

"Get a towel and wind it around my arm just below the elbow," he directed, when she had got him sitting down with his coat off. "Then we'll see."

She not only improvised the tourniquet but bathed the slash in his arm.

"How did it happen?" she questioned tremulously.

"I was coming over here and I'd got to the end of the bridge when I felt a sudden pain in my arm there. A man ran away. That's all I know about it. I was too busy stopping the blood to get after him."

The girl looked up at him. Her irises had contracted to nothing, so that her blue eyes had become black.

"It was Dan Keegan!"

"You think so, after what he said?"

"I know it!"

John Pelty slowly unwound the towel from his arm. He watched for a spurt of blood, but it did not come.

"Put a handkerchief around it," he said. "It's clean and it won't bleed any more. I'm going out for a bit."

She clung to him in terror.

"Where are you going?"

Pelty's upper lids drooped over eyes grown somber. His mouth was hard.

"To find Dan Keegan."

She could only sit and wait for him, and it was a matter of hours. The wind came up from the northwest and a drizzle of rain started. She sat by the window and watched it cover with mist. She heard his footfall at midnight and she opened the door before he could knock.

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"Did you kill him?" she asked.

Pelty knocked his soft hat against the door-jamb and laughed again.

"It wasn't him," he declared. "I found him after I'd searched for four hours. He was in Leary's place at the time I was stabbed. A dozen men said so. He was real friendly after I'd got over my temper. We had a few drinks and he wants me to go fishing with him to-morrow. He's not going out in the tug. I said I'd go."

"He's lying!" the girl said passionately. "I know that man! He stabbed you!"

"I can't prove it," Pelty said. "Don't you want me to go fishin' with him?"

The girl lifted her head in a way that Pelty had not yet seen. Her upper lids drooped as Pelty's had drooped a while before and her mouth, too, was hard.

"Yes," she said. "I do want you to go."

ALL the way down the pier Kate had been watching the northwest. She had been born and raised in the house under the hill and she knew what the least little cloud might portend. In the northwest, in the last fifteen minutes, a cloud had grown from the size of a blanket to the size of an ore boat. And it was speeding, up the sky from the horizon.

"It's going to storm," she told Pelty, who was ahead of her, carrying a basket of food.

"Oh, I guess not," he answered, being inclined to think lightly of any blow which Lake Erie might produce.

Keegan was waiting for them, sitting in a rowboat which danced on the swell breaking in through the harbor entrance. Beyond, the whitecaps were close together and sharp-backed. By now the clouds were half-way up the sky.

"You better not go," said Kate, without looking at Keegan. "It's going to storm."

"I think it's going to storm a little," Keegan assented. "But it won't be bad. The fish'd bite good just before the shower. We don't want to lose that chance."

Before any one could speak there was a swift flicker of lightning and a crash of thunder. Big drops of rain spat down. Keegan, with an oath under his breath, climbed up to the pier and they ran for the life-saving station, reaching it just as a torrent swept in.

There was much rain for five minutes, some booming thunder and flashing lightning. Then the rain ceased abruptly.

"All clear in the northwest," Keegan announced. "Come on, Pelty."

Kate was looking to the south to which the banked clouds had moved.

"The storm isn't over," she said.

"Why, Kate," Keegan laughed, "you never saw a storm break from the south that amounted to anything." He turned to Pelty. "That spot over there," indicating the exact northwest, "is where we get our blows from. Come on."

There was a suppressed eagerness in the man's tone that puzzled Pelty. He turned to Kate. Her face was like chalk. Pelty studied her for a moment. Still he could not understand.

"Shall I go?" he asked.

Kate nodded without speaking, and then she turned and fled up the pier. Pelty watched her till she turned into the street which led to her home.

"That's funny," he said.

Keegan was already in the boat and Pelty dropped into it, his great bulk causing it to ship some water.

"You certainly are hefty!" said Keegan, almost cheerfully, seizing the bailing-can.

Keegan had put a stick up in her and he let out a shred of sail and they passed slowly through the exit and out on the lake.

"We'll go 'way out," Keegan said quite casually. "See if we can't get something worth while. You can be fixing the hooks."

IV

PELTY worked for an hour with bent head. Then a crash of thunder roused him. He looked back. The south was a solid wall of black. The wind was coming out of this with steady, driving force. The offshore breeze had smoothed the lake till it was like an unplaned floor. As Pelty watched, the bank was split from edge to edge by a zigzag flash of lightning. Then the sky seemed rent by thunder. He looked at Keegan.

"Northwest is still blue," Keegan said.

He held the little boat to its course.

"That's five-mile crib," he said presently.

"What're you laughin' at?" Pelty asked.

Keegan's lips straightened themselves.

"Just feel good," he said.

Pelty looked up. The blackness had overspread the sky except for the patch of blue in the northwest.

"I think we better go back," he said.

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"'Fraid?" Keegan asked, and it was as if he had torn a mask from his face.

"What's eating you?" Pelty cried. "What're you trying to do? Where are you going?"

"Fishin'."

Again his tone was peculiar.

"For what?"

"For anything you can get at the bottom of the lake, you —— fool!"

Lightning flared and thunder crashed again. Inshore there was a roar like that of Niagara. Pelty looked back again and saw a wall of water bearing down upon them. Keegan stood up in the boat and lifted the spar from its socket. He cast it overboard.

"We don't want to be caught with no sail up in this," he said, his own face a little pale. "It's some blow. I never saw the south do this."

John Pelty had a sudden comprehension of what Keegan's scheme was. In the next few seconds he divested himself of his coat, trousers and shoes. As the water struck them, he felt the boat turned under him and he saw that Keegan was upsetting it! The next instant Pelty was struggling in the waves. He suspected that Keegan's plan was to leave him at the mercy of the storm and cling to the boat to be picked up.

Pelty was a powerful swimmer and he managed to raise his head and clear his eyes for an instant. His suspicions were confirmed. The boat was floating bottom side up, and Keegan, apparently with no great effort, was clinging to its bow.

"I'll get to him or blow out a cylinder-head tryin' to do it!" Pelty ground out.

Twice he was within touching distance of Keegan, and twice he was swept past. But he fought back inch by inch and the boat came toward him. When he got a chance, Keegan seemed to be searching the face of the waters for him. After what seemed an eternity of struggle Pelty found the boat opposite him, but three feet away. He put all his strength into one spring through the water and landed with his arms about Keegan's neck.

A big hand found Keegan's throat. Pelty held his enemy thus, while with the other hand he took hold of the boat. Keegan struggled, shaking his head like a fighting dog and now and then seeking to tear away the awful grip with a hand taken from its hold on the boat.

He might have known, since he had seen that hand close on Kate's dining-room table, how futile his struggle was. His breath came thickly; he had to close his smarting eyelids to keep his eyes in his head. The blackness that came to him was blacker than that of the storm. Suddenly he relaxed and his other hand slipped from the boat. Pelty dropped an arm under his shoulders. His hand struck something hard. He felt along it. It circled Keegan's body.

"My God!" said Pelty. "He *was* goin' to murder me! He's got on a life-preserver!"

THE life-savers had watched the boat from their tower and had seen it disappear. The storm spent itself to mere moanings and the sky cleared. The life-boat came speeding over the quieting waters. The men found Pelty clinging to the overturned boat with one hand and supporting Keegan with the other.

"All in?" the captain asked.

"Naw," said Pelty. "Feelin' fit as a fiddle. Just a little spill. This guy fainted, I guess."

They took the two men ashore, towing the overturned boat behind them. Pelty waited till Keegan revived. They went out into the sunlight which had followed the storm. Pelty waited to speak three terse sentences. Keegan slunk away, and Pelty went to see Kate.

"He came after me," she sobbed. "He always got what he went after, the men said. I thought I would have to marry him. I was afraid till you came. I thought I couldn't help myself. I knew when you went out in that boat that he was planning to hurt you. But I knew, too, that it had to come to something like that some time, and I was sure you were strong enough to come back to me."

"That's quite flatterin'!" Pelty laughed. "I guess he won't bother you no more. He knows he can't kill me, and he knows I saved him when I might have killed him. He understands I can kill him any time I like, now I'm on to his curves."

"Don't do it!" the girl shuddered.

"I won't. I'm goin' to let him live. We're all goin' to live—especially you and me. Say, the life-savin' Captain said there was a vacancy on the crew. I used to be in the coast service. He looked me over, and I told him I'd take the job. Marry me to-night?"

"Why, certainly," said Kate.

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The King of Beasts?

A Hunter's Tale of the Lion as he Finds him — Dangerous and Contemptible

By W. Robert Foran

ALL big game hunters are divided in their opinions as to which is the most dangerous animal to hunt in Africa. Some select the lion, others the buffalo, others again the rhinoceros, while the greater majority name the elephant. It is purely a matter of which animal, in the hunter's own experience, has been the most dangerous.

Personally, as the result of many years' experience with big game in Africa, I chose the elephant as the most dangerous. Perhaps I have been unduly fortunate in encounters with the lion, and that alone makes him appear anything but the "King of Beasts" that he is so popularly supposed to be.

I have invariably experienced the greatest danger in hunting where elephants were concerned. With lions I have never had any serious trouble. In fact I have rather a sneaking contempt for them, for they are harmless except when they are wounded and followed into the long grass, or in the case of a lioness with cubs. So great a contempt have the men in East Africa for them that they have now taken to hunting them on horseback, riding them down and shooting them with revolvers.

I shall endeavor to show why the hunters of Africa look so lightly upon these tawny beasts of the jungle. I must confess, unless I be misunderstood, that lions may be as dangerous and even more so than other animals of the plains or forests, under certain circumstances, but it has never been my lot to experience any great danger from them. This is primarily due to an inborn caution begot as the result of seven years' hunting in the wilderness of tropical Africa.

At times there are man-eaters at large, but for the most part they are lions that have tasted blood or that are too old to hunt their natural prey, the zebras.

Man-eaters are a rarity rather than otherwise in East Africa and Uganda. In fact I know of only one case where a white man has been eaten by a lion during the whole seven years of my residence in East Africa. The story of this is dreadful enough in its pitiless detail, but there is a touch of humor in the story, notwithstanding.

I was stationed at a small outlying Government post early in 1904, when a native came in one day and reported that a white man, who had been prospecting for land, had disappeared and left his caravan of porters almost starving some days' march away from my post. I hastened out to search for the man and to relieve the porters from their predicament.

On my arrival at the camp I found that the porters had no idea what had become of their master. At first I suspected foul play, but later came to the conclusion that the man had fallen a victim to a prowling beast of the jungles. I instituted a close search and eventually found the head and shoulders of the poor fellow.

He had been eaten by a lion, of that there

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could be no mistake, judging by the remains. The remnants of the body were in a bad state of decomposition and I had them placed in a packing-case for burial. On my way to the grave to perform the burial service I was almost overcome with laughter, despite the sad occasion, by observing on the packing-case coffin the stenciled words "Keep in a cool place," "Stow away from the boilers." The packing-case had been used to ship cans of butter to East Africa, hence the painted signs.

The natives occasionally fall victims to the depredations of lions, but the white man rarely does for some unknown reason. Even then the deaths are more often due to gangrene setting in where men have been mauled and rarely from actual direct killing.

THE FIRST MEETING

I REMEMBER well my first meeting with a lion. I was coming home from a dinner party late at night in Nairobi, the capital of East Africa, and had decided to inspect one of my military guards on the Government railway buildings. When I had approached near enough to the sentry to hear what was going on, I was surprised to hear him banging the corrugated iron wall of the building with the butt end of his Martini-Henri rifle. He was shouting "Shoo! shoo!" at the top of his voice.

I ran toward him to discover what was the matter.

"Why are you making this noise, you fool?" I cried.

"A lion, sir, very near, eating a zebra," he replied.

I ran forward and there sure enough was a big black-maned lion, in the bright moonlight, eating a zebra within fifty yards of the sentry.

He had evidently chased the zebra into the township, killed it and was now happily taking his supper. He paid not the slightest attention to the sentry's noise, but kept on tearing great masses of flesh from the zebra's carcass, purring loudly all the time like a huge cat.

My sympathy was with the sentry, for he dare not leave his post and he dare not fire at the lion, for he was uncertain as to the accuracy of his old weapon, which had been condemned for many years by the Government and was now totally unfit for use.

TELLING the sentry to take advantage of the safety offered him at the top of a near-by lamp-post, I hastened to my house to get my sporting rifle. In order to do this I had to pass within one hundred yards of the lion, who paid no attention to me at all. I hurried back to the spot with my trusty rifle and fired at the lion, badly wounding it. He dashed off into the plains behind the town, emitting angry roars as he went. I decided to follow him for a time at least, but after a tiring chase he outdistanced me and I was forced to return to bed.

Next morning I rode out into the plains and searched for him. I soon picked up his spoor and in two hours had killed my first lion within a few miles of Nairobi township. He was a very fine specimen and well worthy of my initial effort in lion-hunting. I was justly proud of my achievement, but had to submit to a considerable amount of good-natured chaff from my brother officials for being so keen as to hunt my first lion by moonlight in the streets of the town.

On another occasion a young lion cub was found by a party of us under the raised floor of the corrugated-iron post-office building in the main street of Nairobi. It had apparently come into town with its mother to view it by night and had probably been frightened by something and taken refuge under the post-office. Anyway, whatever the cause of its arrival, the fact remains that it was very easily caught and adopted by the postmaster. It grew into a fine sized lion before it took some silly, childish, lion complaint and went the way of all of us.

The game warden of the country had two young lion cubs in his garden and used them as pets. They were the two most playful youngsters imaginable and spent their spare moments stalking any one who might be calling on the owner. I remember taking a little girl to see them on one occasion. The two cubs immediately began to stalk her in a most realistic manner, much to her embarrassment. They died after a short time in captivity. It often happens this way.

HUNTING LIONS FROM HORSEBACK

A PARTY of us went out one Sunday after lions and adopted the novel method of riding them down on pony-back. We had not

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been out long before we "put up" a big tawny fellow and immediately gave chase. There were four of us in the party and we soon rounded the lion up in fine shape. While one of us fired at him in the open plain with a revolver, wounding him badly, he came to bay, clawing up the earth in huge patches with his claws and emitting terrifying roars.

We closed in upon him from all sides, having much ado in getting our ponies to face the unusual situation. One man rode in close and fired at him with his revolver. The lion was wounded mortally for the second time, but sprang savagely at him and seized him by the leg. We were horrified to see the lion drag him off his pony to the ground and rode forward to his rescue. We killed the lion over his body and so saved his life, but unfortunately our efforts were unavailing, for, after living through an agony of torture for a week or more, he died from gangrene poisoning.

That is the first and only case where the hunters have suffered from this new and invigorating form of sport. It beats pig-sticking as an exciting form of sport and is infinitely more enervating than shooting lions by approved methods of hunting. There is something in the wild ride and the attendant risk which is altogether fascinating and irresistible for most men who have once tried this method of lion-hunting.

Quite a number of lions have fallen victims in the field as the result of this new plan of attack. In fact, the game warden has no less than four lions to his credit from this method of killing alone, to say nothing of the numbers which have fallen to his rifle by the accepted form of slaying.

DAY-DREAMING BESIDE A LION

I WAS in the Sotik country one day, trailing out to inspect a detachment of my force, who were on outpost duty. I was alone, about an hour's march ahead of my porters and escort and, it being very hot, I decided to sit and rest until my caravan came up with me. I saw a large and shady bush a short distance from my trail and decided that this would be a very suitable spot to rest. I went over to it and threw myself under its welcome shade. Then I took a satisfying drink from my water-bottle and filled my pipe. I must have sat there for over an hour, smoking and thinking of what I should do when I reached London for my six months' holiday, which was within measurable distance.

I THOUGHT of no danger and smoked and built castles in the air. In due course my porters hove in sight and as they approached they began to sing lustily. Suddenly from behind me something big moved. There was an instant's swishing of the grass and the crackling of twigs and then, lo and behold, a big black-maned lion bounded away from the other side of the bush! I was too astonished to fire and could only stare after it, open-mouthed with astonishment.

I do not know to this day what had really happened, but I suspect that the lion had been asleep in the shade on the other side of the bush, as unaware of my presence as I was of his. It was certainly a remarkable experience and a laughable one, although, in all conscience, it might have ended very differently. My native porters and servants were firmly convinced that I had the evil eye and therefore the lion would not attack me. Nothing could shake their faith in my power over the "King of Beasts." If I had known of the proximity of this wonderfully fine specimen, I should certainly not have sat down and smoked so unconcernedly beside the thorn-bush.

At Muhoroni station in the Nyando valley, near Lake Victoria, in the latter part of 1904 I was taking a stroll out from the camp when the sun had cooled off in the evening. I knew that no lions were ever seen in this vicinity and so did not bother to take a gun with me. My sporting little fox-terrier, "Micky Doolan," kept me company.

I turned my footsteps toward a small stream about a mile and a half from the camp. On arrival at the banks of the almost dried-up river, I stood for a while watching a young reed buck gamboling with its mother. Micky Doolan chased imaginary rats with deep content. Suddenly the long grass on the opposite bank moved apart and a graceful young lioness stepped out into the open! I was considerably taken aback, for I had no means of offense or defense; moreover, she was less than a stone's throw away from me.

I looked at her and she looked at me. Then as quietly as she had come, she departed. My dog had run toward me meanwhile and caught a glimpse of the

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desire to let the full horror of the desert mystery sweep over her.

How long she sat on a rock, gazing into infinity, she did not know. It seemed to her that her whole shivering, protesting body was being absorbed into the strange radiance of the afterglow. At last she rose. As she did so a tall figure loomed silently before her. Rhoda was too startled to scream. The figure was that of an Indian, naked save for high moccasins and a magnificently decorated loin-cloth. The man looked down on her with the smile of good fellowship that she knew so well. It was Kut-le, standing like a young bronze god against the faint pink of the afterglow!

"Hello!" he said nonchalantly. "I've been watching for you."

"What do you want?" gasped Rhoda. "What do you mean by coming before me in—in——"

"You mean when I'm dressed as a chief on the war-path? Well, you thought you'd be keen about me this way, so here I am! I tried all the white methods I knew to win you and failed. Now the only thing left is the Indian method."

Rhoda moved uneasily.

Kut-le went on:

"As a white man, I can no longer pester you. As an Indian I can steal you and marry you."

Rhoda struggled to make him and his words seem real to her.

"You aren't going to be so absurd as to try to steal me, I hope?" she tried to laugh.

"That's just what I'm going to do!" answered Kut-le. "If I steal as a white would steal, I would be caught at once. If I use Apache methods, no white on earth can catch me."

Rhoda gasped as the Indian's evident sincerity sank in on her.

"But," she pleaded, fighting for time, "you can't want to marry me by force! Don't you know that I shall grow to loathe you?"

"No! No!" answered the Indian earnestly. "Not after I've shown you life as I have seen it."

"Nonsense!" cried Rhoda. "Don't you realize that the whole county will be after you by morning?"

Kut-le laughed, deliberately walked up to the girl and lifted her in his arms, as he had on the morning of their meeting. Rhoda gave one scream and struggled frantically. He slid a hand over her lips and tightened his hold. For a moment Rhoda lay motionless in abject fear, then with a muffled cry of utter helplessness, a cry that would have driven a white man mad with pity, she slipped into unconsciousness.

Kut-le walked on for a short distance to a horse. He put Rhoda in the saddle and fastened her there with a blanket. He slipped off the twisted bandanna that bound his short, black hair fillet-wise, and tied it carefully over Rhoda's mouth. Then with one hand steadying the quiet shoulder, he started the horse on through the dusk.

CHAPTER VII

THE RIDE TO THE CAMP

IT WAS some time before the call of a coyote, close beside her, penetrated Rhoda's senses. At its third or fourth repetition she sighed and opened her eyes. Night had come, the luminous, lavender night of the desert. Her first discovery was that she was seated on a horse and held firmly by a strong arm across her shoulders. Next she found that her uneasy breathing was due to the cloth tied round her mouth. With this came realization of her predicament and she tossed her arms in a wild attempt to free herself.

The arm about her tightened, the horse stopped and the voice went on repeating the coyote call, clearly, mournfully. Rhoda ceased her struggling for a moment, and looked at the face so close to her own. In the starlight only the eyes and the dim outline of the features were visible, and the eyes were as dark and menacing to her as the desert night that shut her in.

Mad with fear, Rhoda strained at the rigid arm. Kut-le dropped the reins and held her struggling hands, ceased his calling and waited. Off to the left came an answering call and Kut-le started the pony rapidly toward the sound. In a few moments Rhoda saw a pair of horsemen. Utterly exhausted, she sat in terror, awaiting her fate. Kut-le gave a low-voiced order. One of the riders immediately rode forward, leading another horse. Kut-le slipped another blanket from this and finished binding Rhoda to her saddle so securely that she scarcely could move a finger. Then he mounted his horse and he and one of the Indians started off, leading Rhoda's horse

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between them and leaving the third Indian standing silently behind them.

Rhoda was astride the pony, half sitting, half lying along his neck. The Indians put the horses to a trot and immediately the discomfort of her position was made agony by the rough motion. But the pain cleared her mind.

Her first thought was that she never would recover from the disgrace of this episode. Following this thought came fury at the man who was so outraging her. If only he would free her hands for a moment she would choke him! Her anger would give her strength for that! Then she fought against her fastenings. They held her all but motionless, and the sense of her helplessness brought back the fear panic. Utterly helpless! Flying through darkness to an end worse than death! In the power of a naked savage! Her fear almost robbed her of her reason.

AFTER what seemed to her endless hours, the horses were stopped suddenly. She felt her fastenings removed. Then Kut-le lifted her to the ground, where she tumbled helpless at his feet. He stooped and took the gag from her mouth. Immediately, with what fragment of strength remained to her, she screamed again and again. The two Indians stood stolidly watching her for a time, then Kut-le knelt in the sand beside her huddled form and laid his hand on her arm.

"There, Rhoda," he said. "No one can hear you! You will only make yourself sick."

Rhoda struck his hand feebly.

"Don't touch me!" she cried hoarsely. "Don't touch me, you beast! I loathe you! I am afraid of you! Don't you dare to touch me!"

At this, Kut-le imprisoned both her cold hands in one of his warm palms and held them despite her struggles, while with the other hand, he smoothed her tumbled hair from her eyes.

"Poor frightened little girl!" he said, in his rich voice. "I wish I might have done otherwise, but there was no other way. I don't know that I believe much in your God, but I guess you do. So I tell you, Rhoda, that by your faith in Him you are absolutely safe in my hands!"

Rhoda caught her breath in a childlike sob while she still struggled to recover her hands.

"I loathe you!" she panted. "I loathe you! I loathe you!"

But Kut-le would not free the cold little hands.

"But do you fear me, too? Answer me! Do you fear me?"

The moon had risen and Rhoda looked into the face that bent above hers. This was a naked savage with hawk-like face. Yet the eyes were the ones that she had come to know so well, half tragic, somber, but clear, and, toward her, tender, very, very tender. With a shuddering sigh, Rhoda looked away.

But against her own volition she found herself saying, "I'm not afraid now! But I loathe you, you Apache Indian!"

Something very like a smile touched the grim mouth of the Apache.

"I don't hate you, you Caucasian!" he answered quietly.

He chafed the cold hands for a moment in silence. Then he lifted her to her saddle. But Rhoda was beyond struggle, beyond even clinging to the saddle. Kut-le caught her as she reeled.

"Don't tie me!" she panted. "Don't tie me! I won't fight! I won't even scream, if you won't tie me!"

"But you can't sit your saddle alone," replied Kut-le. "I'll have to tie you."

Once more he lifted her to the horse. Once more with the help of his silent companion he fastened her with blankets. Once more the journey was begun. For a little while, distraught and uncertain what course to pursue, Rhoda endured the misery of position and motion in silence. Then the pain was too much and she cried out in protest. Kut-le brought the horses to a walk.

"You certainly have about as much spunk as a chicken with the pip!" he said contemptuously. "I should think your loathing would brace you up a little!"

Stung by the insult to a sudden access of strength, as the Indian had intended her to be, Rhoda answered, "You beast!"

But, when the horses had swung into the trot, she made no protest for a long hour. Then once more her strength failed her and she fell to crying with deep-drawn sobs that shook her entire body. After a few moments of this, Kut-le drew close to her.

"Don't!" he said huskily, "Don't!"

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and again he laid his hand on her shoulder.

Rhoda shuddered, but could not cease her sobs. Kut-le seemed to hesitate for a few moments. Then he reached over, undid Rhoda's fastenings and lifted her limp body to the saddle before him, holding her against his broad chest as if he were coddling a child. Then he started the horses on. Too exhausted to struggle, Rhoda lay sobbing while the young Indian sat with his tragic eyes fastened steadily on the mysterious distances of the trail. Finally Rhoda sank into a stupor, and, seeing this, Kut-le doubled the speed of the horses.

IT WAS daylight when Rhoda opened her eyes. For a time she lay at ease, listening to the trill of birds and the trickle of water. Then, with a start, she raised her head. She was lying on a heap of blankets on a stone ledge. Above her was the boundless sapphire of the sky. Close beside her a little spring bubbled from the blank wall of the mountain. Rhoda lay in helpless silence, looking about her while the appalling nature of her predicament sank into her consciousness.

Against the wall squatted two Indian women. They were dressed in rough, short skirts, tight-fitting calico waists and high leather moccasins. Their black hair was parted in the middle and hung free. Their swarthy features were well cut, but both of the women were dirty and ill kept. The younger, heavier squaw had a kindly face with good eyes, but her hair was matted with clay and her fingers showed traces of recent tortilla-making. The older woman was lean and wiry, with a strange gleam of maliciousness and ferocity in her eyes. Her forehead was elaborately tattooed with symbols and her toothless old jaws were covered with blue tribal lines.

Kut-le and his friend of the night lounged on a heap of rock at the edge of the ledge. The strange Indian was well past middle age, tall and dignified. He was darker than Kut-le. His face was thin and aquiline. His long hair hung in elf locks over his shoulders. His toilet was elaborate compared with that of Kut-le, for he wore a pair of overalls and a dilapidated flannel shirt, unbelted and fluttering its ends in the morning breeze. As if conscious of her gaze, Kut-le turned and looked at Rhoda. His magnificent height and proportions dwarfed the tall Indian beside him.

"Good morning, Rhoda!" he said gravely.

The girl looked at the beautiful naked body and reddened.

"You beast!" she said clearly.

Kut-le looked at her with slightly contracted eyes. Then he spoke to the fat squaw. She rose hastily and lifted a pot from the little fire beside the spring. She dipped a steaming cup of broth from this and brought it to Rhoda's side. The girl struck it away. Kut-le walked slowly over, picked up the empty cup at which the squaw stood staring stupidly, and filled it once more at the kettle. Then he held it out to Rhoda. His nearness roused the girl to frenzy. With difficulty she brought her stiffened body to a sitting position. Her beautiful gray eyes were black with her sense of outrage.

"Take it away, beast!" she panted.

Kut-le held her gaze.

"Drink it, Rhoda!" he said quietly.

The girl returned his look for a moment, then, hating herself for her weakness, she took the cup and drained it. Kut-le tossed the cup to the squaw, pushed Rhoda back to her blankets and covered her very gently. Then he went back to his boulder. The girl lay staring up at the sky. Utterly merciless it gleamed above her. But before she could more than groan she was asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

RHODA'S SCARF

SHE slept as she had not slept for months. The slanting rays of the westering sun wakened her. She sat up stiffly. The squaws were unpacking a burlap bag. They were greasy and dirty, but they were women and their nearness gave Rhoda a vague sense of protection. They, in turn, gazed with unfeigned curiosity at the tangled glory of her hair, at the hopeless beauty of her eyes, at the pathos of the drooping mouth.

Kut-le still was watching the desert. The madness of the night before had lifted a little, leaving Rhoda with some of her old poise. After several attempts she rose and made her staggering way to Kut-le's side.

"Kut-le," she said, "perhaps you will tell me what you mean by this outrage?"

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The young Indian turned to her. White and exhausted, heavy hair in confusion, Rhoda still was lovely.

"You seem to have more interest in life," he said, "than you have had since I have known you. I thought the experiment would have that effect!"

"You brute!" cried Rhoda. "Can't you see how silly you are? You will be caught and lynched before the day is past."

Kut-le smiled. "Pshaw! Three Apaches can outwit a hundred white men on the trail!"

Rhoda caught her breath.

"Oh, Kut-le, how could you do this thing! How could you! I am disgraced forever! Let me go, Kut-le! Let me go! I'll not even ask you for a horse. Just let me go by myself!"

"You are better off with me. You will acknowledge that yourself before I am through with you."

"Better off!" Rhoda's appalled eyes cut the Indian deeper than words. "Better off! Why, Kut-le, I am a dying woman! You will just have to leave me dead beside the trail somewhere. Look at me! Look at my hands! See how emaciated I am! See how I tremble! I am a sick wreck, Kut-le. You can not want me! Let me go! Try, try to remember all that you learned of pity from the whites. Oh, Kut-le, let me go!"

"I haven't forgotten what I learned from the whites," replied the young man. He looked off at the desert with a quiet smile. "Now I want the whites to learn from me."

"But can't you see what a futile game you are playing? John DeWitt and Jack must be on your trail now."

There was a cruel gleam in the Apache's eyes.

"Don't be too sure! They are going to spend a few days looking for the foolish Eastern girl who took a stroll and lost her way in the desert. How can they dream that you are stolen?"

Rhoda wrung her hands.

"What shall I do! What shall I do! What an awful, awful thing to come to me! As if life had not been hard enough, this catastrophe! This disgrace!"

Kut-le eyed her speculatively.

"It's all race prejudice, you know. I have the education of the white, with the intelligence and physical perfection of the Indian. DeWitt is nowhere near my equal."

Rhoda's eyes blazed.

"Don't *speak* of DeWitt! You're not fit to!"

"Yet"—very quietly—"you said the other night that I had as good a brain and was as attractive as any man of your acquaintance."

"I was a fool!" exclaimed Rhoda.

Kut-le rose and took a stride or two up and down the ledge. Then he folded his arms across his chest and stopped before Rhoda, who leaned weakly against the boulder.

"I am going to tell you what my ideas are," he said. "You are intelligent and will understand me, no matter how bitter my words may make you at first. Now look here. Lots of white men are in love with you. Even Billy Porter went off his head. But I guess DeWitt is a pretty fair sample of the type of men you draw—well educated, strong, well-bred and Eastern to the backbone. And they love you as you are, delicate, helpless, appealing, thoroughbred, but utterly useless!

"Except that they hate to see you suffer, they wouldn't want you to change. Now I love you for the possibilities that I see in you. I wouldn't think of marrying you as you are. It would be an insult to my good blood. Your beauty is marred by your illness. You have absolutely no sense of responsibility toward life. You think that life owes everything to you, that you pay your way with your beauty. If you didn't die, but married DeWitt, you would go on through life petted and babied, bridge-playing and going out to lectures, childless, incompetent, self-satisfied—and an utter failure!

"Now I think that humans owe everything to life, and that women owe the most of all because they make the race. The more nature has done for them, the more they owe. I believe that you are a thousand times worth saving. I am going to keep you out here in the desert until you wake to your responsibility to yourself and to life. I am going to strip your veneering of culture from you and make you see yourself as you are, and life as it is, life big and clean and glorious with its one big tenet: keep body and soul right and reproduce your kind. I am going to make you see bigger things in this big country than you ever dreamed of."

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SHE STOPPED and Rhoda sat appalled, the Indian watching her. To relieve herself from his eyes Rhoda turned toward the desert. The sun had all but touched the far horizon. Crimson and gold, purple and black, desert and sky merged in one unspeakable glory. But Rhoda saw only emptiness, only life's cruelty and futility and utter loneliness. And once more she wrung her feeble hands.

Kut-le spoke to Molly, the fat squaw. She again brought Rhoda a cup of broth. This time Rhoda drank it mechanically, then sat in abject wretchedness, awaiting the next move of her tormentor. She had not long to wait. Kut-le took a bundle from his saddle and began to unfasten it before Rhoda.

"You must get into some suitable clothes," he said. "Put these on."

Rhoda stared at the clothing Kut-le was shaking out. Then she gave him a look of disgust. There was a pair of little buckskin breeches, exquisitely tanned, a little blue flannel shirt, a pair of high laced hunting-boots and a sombrero. She made no motion toward taking the clothes.

"Can't you see," Kut-le went on, "that, at the least, you will be in my power for a day or two; that you must ride, and that the clothes you have on are simply silly? Why not be as comfortable as possible under the circumstances?"

The girl, with the conventions of ages speaking in her disgusted face, the savage with his perfect physique bespeaking ages of undistorted nature, eyed each other narrowly.

"I shall keep on my own clothes," said Rhoda distinctly. "Believe me, you alone give the party the primitive air you admire!"

Kut-le's jaw hardened.

"Rhoda Tuttle, unless you put these clothes on at once I shall call the squaws and put them on you by force."

Into Rhoda's face came a look of despair. Slowly she put out a shaking hand and took the clothes.

"I can't argue against a brute," she said. "The men I have known have been gentlemen. Tell one of your filthy squaws to come and help me."

"Molly! *Pronto!*" Like a brown lizard the fat squaw scuttled to Rhoda's side.

In a little dressing-room formed by fallen rock Rhoda put on the boy's clothing. Molly helped the girl very gently. When she was done, she smoothed the blue-shirted shoulder complacently.

"Heap nice!" she said. "Make 'em sick squaw heap warm. You no 'fraid! Kut-le say cut off nose, kill 'em with cactus torture if Injuns not good to white squaw."

The touch was the touch of a woman, and Molly, though a squaw, had a woman's understanding. Rhoda gave a little sob.

"Kut-le, he's good!" Molly went on. "He's a big chief's son. He's strong, rich. You no be afraid. You look heap pretty."

Involuntarily Rhoda glanced at herself. The new clothes were very comfortable. With the loveliness and breeding that neither clothing nor circumstance could mar, Rhoda was a fascinating figure. She was tall for a woman, but now she looked a mere lad. The buckskin clung like velvet. The high laced boots came to her knees. The sombrero concealed all of the golden hair save for short curling locks in front. She would have charmed a painter, Kut-le thought, as she stepped from her dressing-room, but he kept his voice coolly impersonal.

"All right! You're in shape to travel now. Where are your other clothes? Molly, bring them all here!"

Rhoda followed the squaw and together they folded the cast-off clothing. Rhoda saw that her scarf had blown near the canyon edge. A quick thought came to her. Molly was fully occupied with muttering adoration of the dainty underwear. Rhoda tied a pebble into the scarf and dropped it far out into the depths below. Then she returned to Molly.

TO BE CONTINUED

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The Gang-Leader's Legacy

by Willett Stockard

ON THE wall of a little saloon near Chatham Square there is a card which bears the plaintive appeal:

PLEASE DO NOT SWEAR IN HERE
IT SOUNDS WORSE THAN ——

The statement contained in the legend can not be questioned, and there is also something plausible in the advice given just below it in a sentence which reads:

IF YOU WANT TO FIGHT, JOIN THE ARMY

But there is no recruiting-office within several blocks, or it may be that some of the frequenters of the place are unable to read. At any event, the admonition to the pugnacious is ruthlessly disregarded upon occasion.

A question of precedence had just been settled by a sailor and a man who had tried to pass him in the narrow space between a table and the bar, and the latter was led away for some urgently needed dental attention. The sailor remained to be administered to by some newly made acquaintances for whom he had been buying a number of drinks. It must have been a large number, for the manner in which they were bandaging their patient's battered face differed materially from the methods sanctioned by the best hospital authorities.

The sailor had been struck upon his left eye, which was rapidly becoming dark and was already half-closed, but those in attendance upon him were using the utmost care in adjusting the bandage about his right eye. The victim accepted their ministrations without a word of criticism or of suggestion. To show his gratitude for their kindness he drew forth a bill and called for another round of drinks.

Sight of the denomination of the bill at once attracted the interest of Tim McCue, who was seated at a table, from which he had observed the recent surgical activities with grave attention. He cast a critical look upon the men drinking with the sailor and decided that they were of little consequence and had no plans against their acquaintance other than to allow him to pay for as many drinks as possible. Then he sank back in his chair and waited for the sailor to leave.

While he waited he spent the time in making damp circles upon the table with the bottom of his glass and in speculating upon the amount of money the sailor had in his possession. He was badly in need of money just at the time.

McCue was the leader of a gang on the lower East Side, and affairs had gone badly of late. One of his following had become

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involved in a case which placed a heavy tax upon the gang and, in addition, McCue was unfortunate in some private matters. So when the sailor finally bade farewell to his acquaintances, McCue went quietly out at a side door.

He waited for a moment before strolling around the corner, and then sauntered off in the direction taken by the sailor, following him at a distance of probably half a block. He continued to follow while his prospective victim went on his way through a number of streets.

They were fairly well lighted, but McCue was patient. He knew that in the course of his wanderings the other would go into some street that was dark and deserted. His only concern was for the amount of money the sailor still retained.

But the latter kept to the more populous streets as he made his way across the city, and McCue gradually became alarmed. For his victim was going toward the West Side, and on West Street there was a gang that was an old enemy of his own following. Conflicts between the factions were infrequent, as they lived in opposite parts of town, but no recognized truce existed. Open warfare was imminent whenever representatives of the two chanced to encounter each other. As a general thing, the members of each gang carefully refrained from venturing into the territory of the enemy.

The antagonism existing between the gangs as a whole was of a general, impersonal nature for the most part, the kind that exists between the soldiers of warring armies; but between the leaders themselves there was an enmity that was intense and unholy. "Limpy" Crowson, the chief of the West Street gang, owed the first part of his name to a bullet that had been fired by McCue.

They had met in conflict more than once and both bore marks that precluded forgetting. Neither was of the type that forgives. They hated each other with the hatred of men who hated everything and everybody, except their friends, whom they would risk their lives for, and the police, at whom they laughed.

SO McCUE became greatly concerned as they approached the enemy's boundary-line. He drew closer to the man ahead of him. But it seemed that the latter, with drunken luck, had chosen streets upon which a number of people were abroad. They had almost reached the border of Crowson's territory before the sailor happened to turn into one of the darker side streets.

McCue at once quickened his steps and was rapidly gaining, when something caused him to stop dead still. At the opposite end of the little street there appeared Crowson and a companion. They passed under a light as they turned into the street down which McCue and the sailor were going, but McCue could have recognized his enemy by his limp alone. There was little left to do but give up the pursuit, for McCue's hatred rarely got the better of his judgment. Thoughts of the loss of his prey and his need of the money caused him a moment of indecision, but in the end he stepped deeper into the shadow and watched.

From his position, he saw Crowson and his companion approach the sailor, stop him and begin a conversation. It seemed that the sailor had become a trifle uneasy. He looked about him and was attempting to pass on, when Crowson struck him over the head with a short weapon. The man fell without a word, and after stooping over him for an instant, Crowson and the other went rapidly toward the end of the street from which they had come. As they turned the corner into the lighted crossing, McCue saw that they almost ran into a policeman, who looked at them closely and passed on.

McCue grinned slightly when he thought of the case against his enemy when the victim was found. It was only for an instant that he relaxed his rigid expression, however, for, even aside from his hatred of Crowson and his resentment at being robbed of a man he was intending to rob, the loss of the money meant much to him. Such opportunities as the one just taken from him did not occur frequently, now that his luck had turned on him. The more he thought over the matter, the more reluctant he felt toward relinquishing his hopes of a profitable night. And then an idea came into his mind, the idea of a plan so daring that he accepted it instantly for fear its boldness would cause him to give it up upon second thought.

He hastened away, and, half a dozen blocks farther on, he sneaked down the dark little alley in which Crowson lived, as he himself knew. It would have been comparatively easy for the members of one

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gang to assassinate the chief of the other, as neither McCue nor Crowson took especial precautions to guard himself, except during the periods when his band was actively engaged with some enemy.

From McCue's knowledge of Crowson he expected him to visit his lodgings at once in order to make preparations to leave town until there was no longer danger of being locked up on the charge of attacking and robbing his recent victim. McCue's theory was correct. He had not waited more than a few minutes when Crowson appeared.

The latter started when he saw the other and made a movement for his knife, but McCue reassured him.

"I've come to talk business," said McCue. "I know you're in a hurry, but this ain't goin' to take long, an', besides, I got you anyway you take it. Now listen to this. That stiff I seen you drop while ago was mine. I made him over near Mott Street an' trailed him over here, an' I'd got him, if you hadn't cut in ahead of me. I know what he had on him," he lied, "an' you might as well come over with it. D'you get me? You'll either come clean about it, or I'll fix——"

But there came a quick movement of Crowson's arm—not so suddenly that McCue could not raise his pistol, but so quickly that his hand was almost severed before he could press the trigger. The pistol fell to the ground. McCue attempted to grapple, but Crowson shook him off and twice dug his knife into the other's stomach. Then he turned and darted from the alley.

During the struggle there was not a sound, and McCue made no outcry after he was stabbed. He stood for awhile leaning against a wall, his shoulders hunched forward and his unimpaired arm pressed across his stomach. Then he tried to make his way off. Several times, as he walked slowly toward the end of the little alley, he was compelled to stop and support himself, and more than once he came near falling. He grew dizzy and became weaker, and when he reached the partially lighted street into which the alley ran he sank to the ground.

SHE WAS seen, and a short time later an ambulance deposited him at the hospital. His wounds were examined, but that was about all that could be done for him. The doctor told him that there was no hope. His injuries were fatal.

An officer asked the name of his assailant, and McCue answered according to the formula.

"If I get out, I'll get him, an' if I don't, my doubler will."

He cursed the police when they persisted in their effort to get some information about the affair, and when told by the surgeon that death was but a matter of another day or two at most, he promptly replied that the surgeon was a liar. He continued to assert that he would recover, but in spite of all he grew steadily weaker. At last he acknowledged that he was beaten.

He asked for his best friend, his chief lieutenant in affairs of the gang, and the latter was allowed to see him for awhile. McCue rallied slightly and inquired about the news.

"Dey've got Limpy Crowson," his friend told him. "Picked him up for croakin' a lush over near West Street. Bull seen him takin' it on de run, an' after dat dey find dis gink wit' his dome crushed. Got him for fair, I guess. Dey say he'll git de chair wit' de juice turned on, dis time."

"You stick around," McCue told him.

Then he called an attendant and asked for some one from headquarters, saying that he had some information to give.

When the officers arrived McCue had grown much weaker, but aroused himself with a great effort. He was hardly able to speak, and paused for a moment after very few words. It seemed that he was greatly concerned as to whether what he said would be accepted by the officers.

"I croaked the stiff you picked up Limpy Crowson for," he said, when he was assured that everything he said would be taken down as he said it. "I was slow about it, an' he knifes me fin. He gigs me three times before I gets to hand a piece o' pipe over his bean. Then I walks off, but before I gets half a dozen blocks I goes to pieces an' they found me. An' there you are."

He watched the officer closely while he spoke, and willingly answered the questions they asked him.

"He ain't no friend of mine, Crowson ain't," he added, after the others had taken all of the information wanted. "You know how it is, though. I don't like to kick in knowin' that another gink's goin' to get somethin' that ought a be comin' to me."

The officers withdrew, and McCue whis-

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pered for the nurse to have his friend draw nearer the bedside.

"I want to make me will," he murmured.

The nurse drew aside, and the friend bent over the dying man.

The latter was unable to speak at first. He could only look up at his friend, his frantic struggles showing the effort he was making to convey some request to the other. But the other understood without the need of a word, and nodded his head.

"You—get—him!" McCue was finally able to gasp.

"Leave him to me," said the other in an impassive tone.

McCue died and was buried upon the following day, and earlier in the same day Crowson was released.

He did not attend the funeral, but he was present at one just two days later. He rode in the place of honor at the head of the procession.

The Fat Head God o' Luck

by George C. Hull

"BILLIKENS is barred!"

Lou the Lucky, erstwhile king of confidence men, but now purveyor of potent spirits at "The Place of the Golden Mitt," smote the bar upon which he was leaning to emphasize this sturdy declaration, the while his menacing eye roved from that point on the floor where Jim Quong, the porter, was sweeping fragments of a plaster of Paris statuette into a dust-pan, to an Italian with a basket full of the images who was crouching behind the stove in apparent distress of mind.

As the porter completed his task, Lou the Lucky beckoned to the wobegone son of Italy and, taking a dollar from the cash register, flung it on the bar.

"Here's your coin for what I smashed, but you, Victor Emanuel Nicoletti, listen to me! You can peddle George Washingtons in my place. Also Abe Lincolns, Garibaldis, Bismarcks and Napoleons; even Coopids and Venus Milos won't rile me none, but don't ever bring any more of them good-luck idols around. If you do, you'll get 'em broke up for you, free gratis, savve?"

Catching up the money, the peddler fled through the swinging doors, and Lou the Lucky, smiling once more, turned to his early morning visitor, in explanation:

YOU may well wonder, son, as to why I should run amuck just because a poor ignorant Guinney sticks one of them good-luck figures on my bar and asks me to buy it—me whose heart is so full of malice toward anything lookin' like an idol that if I had a few other qualifications which I understands is necessary, I could make good as a missionary most any place.

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But, during my career as a confidence operator, son, it has become needful for me to travel at times when the reformers has secured control and the new chief of police hasn't begun to look through automobile catalogues and be seen in conversation with diamond brokers.

At such times I have been seized with a mad desire to travel far and fast, and my adventures in so doing has been as full of lights and shadows as a checker-board. It was during one of these trips, son, that I hit the idol country during the open season. Through no fault of mine I'm hoisted into power as the guardeen of an A 1 Joss. None of your pretty larceny idols like that Billiken thing!

It was in Calcutta, India, son, that I run afoul of this adventure with one of the three million gods which the natives of that perspiring country finds necessary to regulate their conduct.

I'm strolling along Clive Street, which is the water-front on the Hoogli River, watching that saddle-colored stream flow down to the sea.

I am innocent of having money through having tried to con the simple Hindus with tricks which I learns too late has been practised by them for 3,000 years or so. Naturally I ain't in no melodious nor cheerful mood, and the wind, as it blows through the rigging of them big wind-jammers ranged along the docks, sounds so sad and mournful like, that I think of the words of the poet, "Them melancholy days has come, the worst I ever seen," and walks down a flight of steps to the river-bank with the full intention of jumping in and ending my wanderings by floating out to sea as a corpse.

But what with the fearful muddy water and me being a gent of cleanly habits, I'm having some argument with myself as to whether I had better not go to work and earn some coin whereby I can procure the means to snuff out in a more respectable manner, when I feel something hit my foot and looking down see that a little wave has deposited there a billet of wood about a foot and a half long. Something hunches me to pick it up and there I'm holding in my hand the living picture of Old Man Trouble, whittled out of some kind of hard black wood.

The face on that there statute is certainly the most hidjeous which could be devised. It resembled the mug of a Billiken a lot, only there ain't the funny foolishness depicted. Instead, this wooden party wears a most ferocious grin and the general terrifying aspect is made stronger by the eyes, which is red under lashes of white hair. It's head is broader than it is long, giving it a nice knobby appearance.

I STAND there quite a while gazing at that there image. Once I thinks to throw it back, but I'm a believer in luck in them days and when I remember how the river sort of gives it to me, just when I'm figuring on giving myself to the river, I get superstitious and decides to keep it.

"Old pal," I says to it, "you sure ain't much for looks. I don't know whether you are an idol or is used to scare the flies off heathen babies, but in spite of your villainous face I'm going to stick to you. I don't know your name, address nor qualifications, not having a copy of the Hindu Idol Directory handy, but I know what I'm in need of, so I christen you the Fat Head God o' Luck. Now get busy!"

With this soliloquy I picks up a piece of twine and suspends his nibs by the neck under my coat, for I figures that I won't be any too happy if them Hindus sees a rank outsider packing around one of their pet idols.

Take it from me, that idol begins to make medicine right away, for just as I get through stowing him away comfortable under my armpit, I gets a slap on the back and, turning around, see a British seafaring man grinnin' at me through a tangled bunch of whiskers.

"Buck up, mess-mate!" he shouts. "Don't look so down-'earted; better dyes is on the wye."

"You'd better join the days, you and that distressful accent of yours," I says, "and leave me to my sad and bitter reflections. Roughly speakin' blow by while the wind is warm and from the south."

But the fuzzy sailor-man wasn't to be got rid of by no display of temper.

"Matey," he says, hookin' an arm through mine," le's go and get a bit o' rum wot'll warm yer 'art. 'Ere I am with a pocket full o' silver what must be spent. The ports of the Seven Seas knows me, Tommy Jacobs, as a lad wot is alwyes on the lookout to 'elp 'ooman derelicts wot is flyin' distress signals. You come along o' me an' I'll

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introduce you to as fine a party of old sea dogs as you 'ud wish to see."

Now mebbe because this is the first white man who has spoke me decent since I'm cast out of the Grand Hotel for non-payment of dues, or because the Fat Head God o' Luck was gettin' in his work, I trots along with old timber-toe. The first thing I know I'm being introduced around to a bunch of guys with maps like forest reserves, their whiskers growing clear up to their eyes, so that they reminds me of Scotch terriers, which is proper enough for sea-dogs. It's Captain This and Captain That, and we all have a drop of rum—several of 'em in fact. They was specially kind to me, mixing the drinks, so that the last thing I remembers that particular evening is seeing Tommy Jacobs coming at me with his wooden leg in his hand. I view a million ships anchored upside down in the sky, somebody blows a bass horn in my ear, and I takes the count.

WHEN I come to, I'm lying in a long narrow box which I takes to be a coffin. This melancholy piece of furniture is pitching and rolling somethin' awful. I feel a board over the end of my nose as I'm lying on my back, and hope does a Marathon. "Buried alive," thinks I, "and that in the middle of an earthquake and no chance to win out!" I rolls over on somethin' hard which don't make my aching bones feel better. Reaching to see what the obstruction is which don't permit of a man resting quiet in his casket, I encounters that image which I so gleesomely dangled from my shoulder when in the cheerful noonday I had decided that there was something better coming to me than being food for such fishes as inhabits the Hoogli River.

"Oh, you Fat Head God o' Luck!" I says, drawing him out. "See what you have brought me to."

And with that my restin'-place gives an extra heave and as my nose kisses off the board over it, I feel the end has come and closes my eyes so as to appear natural.

I opens them to find a lantern shining in my face and the man that's holding it tugging at my arm.

"Turn out!" he says accompanying the command with a lot of salt deep-sea adjectives. "The Cap'n wants to see you on deck."

"Wise me to where I am," I says. "I've been havin' bad dreams."

"Shipped as able seaman on the good ship *Mogul* bound for Liverpool. Come a runnin', ye wharf rat, or I'll assist ye!"

I move to roll out, and bump my head, which is aching somethin' fierce. Groaning, I lies down again. With that the gink with the light reaches over and hands me an awful wallop on the jaw.

"Will ye get up when the mate tells ye to or do you want me to take ye apart?" he says.

Believe me, son, I goes out of that bunk, me and the Fat Head God o' Luck, for I can't see anybody hittin' me and getting by with it.

One swing of that ugly-featured idol douses the light, and the second bangs on the mate's head and he goes down with a cry of "help!" Comes a sound of runnin' feet and there in the darkness a bunch of oily, half-naked bodies is piled on top of me, and the next thing I know I'm dragged on deck by a gang of Lascar sailors who ain't nothin' more nor less than blighted idolaters. I takes one look around and sees I'm in bad. Facing me is one of the same baboon-faced Captains to which I had the misfortune to be introduced by the one-legged sailor-man. Standin' beside him is the party which calls himself mate. He is rubbing of his head and don't appear none too cheerful. The rest of them standing around is the poor ignorant heathen.

His nibs with the tangled shrubbery on his mug looks at me a second, then without a word steps up close and slips me a punch on the jaw which floors me. As I'm gettin' to me feet in a rain-storm of stars, the mate passes me another and down I go again. Blind with anger and pain, I'm getting on my knees, when something bangs against my ribs and again my hand closes over that dear old image which, tethered to my shoulder as it is, don't forsake me in the scrimmage below.

"Fat Head to the rescue!" I shouts, and comin' up with him in my hand, I bowls down the Captain and the mate.

"Mutiny, murder and sudden death!" howls old Mattress Face, scuttlin' behind a mast on all fours. "I'll cut yer bloomin' 'art out an' feed it to the sharks!" he says, shoutin' an order which makes the Lascars start for me.

I gets my back to the rail and raises old Fat Head. Son, when the foremost heathen gets a flash of that hideous visage, he gives

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a yell of fear which is echoed by the rest as they sight it, and the bunch of 'em in wild tumultuous confusion rushes aft to the forecastle, leavin' me facing the Captain and the mate.

Having expected a fearful battle with a bad ending, nothin' could have surprised me more. Them pirates could have put me on the mat right then and there, only they, too, was speechless. The Captain come to first.

"Wot in —— 'ave you there?" he inquires most respectful.

"This, me Bucko," I says, "is the Fat Head God o' Luck. My intentions is to use him whichever way he comes in most handy, as a club or as an idol, so lay off me, you lilac-trimmed kidnapper, or I'll give you another knock-down to him."

"Heasy, now, heasy; you ain't goin' to be 'urted," and the Captain steps back, just as the mate who has slipped up behind during the powwow throws his arms around me, pulling me to the deck.

The Captain is on me in a second and, jerkin' Fat Head out of my hands, is just about to heave him overboard when two Lascars whose faces bears every sign of terror, pinion his felonious arm. As the mate, in stupefaction, lets go of me, one of the heathen takes the image most tender like and lays it in my unresisting hands. Then he gets down on his knees and bumps the deck with his forehead.

"O, brave Sahib" he says, and I notice he has his fingers crossed, "thou who art the guardeen of that most dread divinity Ram Chunder Rao, at whose command comes pestilence, famine and all manner of evil, wilt thou deign to remove the light of his awful countenance from among those who are his servants and would wish to continue in their present humble poverty and miserable health, desiring not additional burdens of wo which would cause them to perish?"

"I don't know where this guy has been to college," I remarks with a superior smile to the Captain and mate, who is standin' by with awestruck countenances, "but I judge from his spiel that I'm in pretty good with the heathen, which is the majority aboard this tub."

This don't make 'em cheerful, especially as they looks to the forecastle and there spies thirty other Lascars all kneeling with their heads to boards in sign of obedience.

"This 'ere is certainly a rum go," stammers the bewildered Captain. "Wot do you make of it, mate?"

"I'll bloody well find out!" and the mate pulls the piteous-faced Hindu aside and splutters at him in the vernacular.

"All this makes me feel most 'orrid strange," remarks the Captain in a supplicatin' tone of voice.

"An' yer due to feel wuss nor that," says the mate, comin' up from his interview. "Hevry 'Indoo on this ship is blind looney over that there hidol bein' 'ere and they say as 'ow you can 'ang 'em or shoot 'em, but they can't afford to do a thing but pray while that 'ere beach-comber an' 'is hugly friend is on this wessel."

"Ho, you're a Jonah, eh?" chuckles the Captain, turnin' to me with a sinful grin. "Overboard with both of you!"

ALARMED by this bloodthirsty language, I'm ready to use old Fat Head for what may be the last time, but the mate is talking again.

"Jonah!" he exclaims bitterly. "Jonah was a gentleman and a man o' parts compared to that 'ere hidol! W'y, bli'me, from wot I 'ear 'e is the big Jinks, the reg'lar picter o' bad luck, an' it is the 'abit of the 'Indoos to treat im most polite w'ile 'e is in their company. It seems as 'ow hevery village 'as one of 'em lyin' around, an' w'en sickness 'its the village or the bloomin' crops fail an' the poor cusses begins to feel as 'ow there is wuss to come, w'y they put the bleedin' hidol on a little wagon wot is built especially for 'im an' 'auls 'im over to the boundary-line of the next town, 'opin' in their blasted 'arts as 'ow 'e will carry the bad luck to the next place.

"The guardeen of the himage goes along with it an' camps close by until the bad luck passes over, or the villagers wot is intended to receive the precious gift pays the guardeen to move along to another town. But they have got to be treated respectful like—both the hidol an' 'is guardeen—the tall heathen makes that plain to me."

When the Captain hears this, he looks most serious and, comin' up gently, pats the Fat Head.

"Nothin' superstitious about me," he says, "but I've got to respect these Johnnies' religious beliefs or never more will I see 'ome. You're the guardeen of this hugly mug wot is to be passed along, an' my plain

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dooty is to 'elp you on yer wye," and he gives orders to lower a boat and provision it. "You an' the Fat 'Ead God o' Luck, which you are so bloomin' fond of, can take a trip," he says, "off o' this wessel, an' I wish you joy travelin' with an hidol wot 'as the repitation of bein' a triple-dashed Jonah an' 'oodoo combined," and he laughs most outrageous.

Now these slurs on a party what has befriended me on numerous occasions ain't noways to my likin', also my money-gettin' instincts, which has been wilted by the wiles of India's professional separators, is revived once more by what the mate babbles of the dooties of an idol's guardeen, so I'm prepared to laugh last, which accordin' to the dope books is the most auspicious time to engage in merriment.

"Say, you," I says, "kindly take them funny wrinkles out o' that gargoyle you calls a face, and see how you like the ultimatum of the gent what you have shamefully abused before you learned he is in charge of the personally conducted excursion of the Fat Head God o' Luck. You heard what the tall heathan told the mate. We have got to be treated respectful, and we don't move from this ship until the parties who is afflicted by our presence makes it worth while for us to depart.

"In plain words, neither me nor my trusty friend the Fat Head leaves until it is put forcible to us that we are going to reap a goodly financial benefit by so doing. Put it in my hand, and if the numbers on the green is big enough, we'll leave you. The Fat Head has treated me right and, as his guardeen, I'm going to see that he gets what's coming to him."

At this, the tall Lascar cuts in, sniffling all the while.

"The Sahib with the heart of gold speaks the truth, albeit he uses words which although of the English sound are beyond my understanding. He must be paid and permitted to go in peace, else——" and he motioned significantly toward the forecastle from which comes a wail of anger and despair. The Captain turns white under his whiskers. "Come below," he says, "I want to talk with you as man to man."

"'Ave a drop o' rum," he says, real cordial, when we gets in his cabin, but I decline, havin' recollections of drops we took together before.

Then he asks me pointblank if I'll take fifty dollars and a week's provisions and bid him a welcome farewell.

"You can call that thing what you please," he says, "the Fat Head God O' Luck, the statoo o' Liberty, or a blarsted hugly hidol, but I puts him down in the log-book as a Jonah an' I ain't sailed the deep seas forty year not to know that when a Jonah comes aboard the only thing to do is to get 'im off in jig time. There's land over to west some'eres which you can make, or some other ship wot ain't got a crew of simple-minded 'eathen will pick you hup. Shake 'ands on it!"

I ignores his soiled mitt, son, for believe me, I'm shocked, grieved and mortified by the cheapness of this old pirate and I says so, waxing eloquent and indignant. Castin' away disguise, I rises to the occasion.

"Know me!" I says. "I'm Lou the Lucky, the man who sold the first gold brick, and author of that famous scientific work entitled 'Connin' the Come On's, or the Gentle Art of Separation.' I never loses a bet when it comes to parting boobs like you from their bank-rolls. I don't go for white money either, and when I don't see a chance to make at least a thousand by thinking hard for a minute, why, I just naturally hibernates like a bear until I'm in condition again. I've just come out of my trance, so think fast and make a gladsome metallic sound like a mint. I'm grievin' for the heathen what don't know any better than to think me and old Fat Head are circulatin' trouble factories, but I sheds no tears for you. That shanghai job was an evil deed, but, like the fowl which it is named after, has come home to roost. Talk in handsome figures or we don't start on this happy excursion, and that goes as it lays!"

NOW while I'm puttin' me sentiments plain and straight to this bewhiskered man o' sin, he's been tossing rum down his hatchway, so that when I comes to a stop through lack of breath, he is blubberin' with his head on the table.

"'Ere I am," he sobs, "a man wot is a prop of the church in 'is 'ome port and well thought of, 'avin truck with a blackmailin' Jonah an' caterin' to hidols, all on account of a lot of silly 'eathen which I 'as to 'ave to sail my ship. Me a Capting, an' I don't dare use no wiolence on my own wessel

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to get rid o' wot 'as been shoved upon me by a one-legged 'Oogli River mud-'ook which if I ever lives to walk Clive Street again, is goin' to be 'ammered to death by 'is own leg, s'elp me. Wot's yer price, ye blood-sucker?"

"Slip me," I says, "just two thousand U. S., which is four hundred pounds of your lime-juice currency. I'd make it more, only from the inventory I have took of your old barge, I figure that's about all the traffic will bear. Gimme the aforesaid bundle of dough and me and Fat Head will overlook the insults and injuries which you have heaped on us, and take a chance with the crool waves."

"I'll not do it!" screams the Captain, staggering to his feet and brandishing of the rum-bottle. "I'll not send the profits of four 'ard woyages to —— along o' you an' a blasted bleedin' fat 'ead hidol. I'll throw ye both overboard first an' the 'eathen can be——"

"Two of the Lascars 'as took to their bunks feelin' sick, already," says the mate, stickin' his head in the door. "The rest of 'em is whettin' o' their knives on the 'ard soles of their feet and talkin' real nawsty. Best give this shark wot 'e wants and be rid o' 'im."

"An' my own mate is willin' to see me started toward beggary an' the poor 'ouse!" gulps the Captain, swabbing his eyes with his tarry coat-sleeve. "Ho, wery well. Give this thief o' all the world four 'undred pun out o' the locker, mate. I'm an old man an' it comes crool 'ard to be robbed at this time o' life. I'm feelin' wery ill, too."

"Mebbe there's somethin' in what the heathen says about sickness and sudden death bein' the pals of that there Fat Head God o' Luck," I suggests. "Anyway," I says, "just look back over the evil life which you have lead and think of the oceans of rum which you have swilled and make up your mind to turn over a new leaf. It's never too late to mend your ways, and——"

"Get that boat out!" roars the Captain, comin' to life at my insijious suggestion and rushing on deck. "Put a keg of water in it and a pack o' ship's biscuits! Clear ship of this precious hidol and its 'angdog guardeen!"

Within half an hour, son, the Lascars is burnin' punk sticks, beatin' gongs and chanting a shivery heathen hymn, while the Captain is having a fit on the quarter-deck. The tall Hindu with the weepy face addresses me, just as me and the Fat Head are embarking.

"The Sahib is brave," he says "to travel with Ram Chunder Rao. He ees ver' bad luck."

"He's been good luck to me," I replies, thinkin' of the two thousand, "and I'm going to stick with him."

The Lascar shook his head pityingly.

"Ram Chunder Rao smiles to hide the evil in his heart. He will strike when the Sahib sleeps and dreams most happily."

"Aw, nix on them superstitions," I replies. "Cheer up, bo, I'm leavin' you."

"And with that I pulls away over the Injun Ocean which sets and smiles so bloomin' blue, as the poet relates. In the stern sits the Fat Head God o' Luck, also smilin', but ferocious.

II

SON, that lanky Hindu with the crocodile face wasn't no phoney fortune-teller. What he predicted about that idol and his treacherous habits is put real forcible to me as the truth. It's because of his subsequent low-down, ornery conduct that I hates graven images like poison and treats 'em hostile, as you see by what I done to the Dago's Billiken.

In two hours' time after leaving the ship I gets in the track of a big steamer bound for Liverpool and am welcomed aboard. All hands hears as much of my tale as I cares to relate and view me and the Fat Head with admiration and curiosity. Also on the trip I plays scientific poker in the smokin'-room and wins a thousand more. Of course Fat Head takes first place in my affections as the best mascot I ever see. But when we tie up at Liverpool the secret of his hijeous smile is revealed.

As I walk down the gangplank happy and contented with Fat Head under my arm, a quiet appearin' party puts his hand on my shoulder. Having had hands placed on the same spot before, I know what's coming off, but I tries to look surprised.

"A word with you, me man," he says.

"My first name is Loquacious: have as many as you like," I laughs, but I have a cold chill at my heart.

"Would you mind going along o' me and explainin' where you got that bit o' luggage you have there?" and he touches Fat Head.

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"Oh, not at all," I replies, for I remember I have a bank-roll and figure all I have to do is to slip him a part of it, as is sometimes the neccessary introduction to the police in the dear old U. S. A.

But oh, what a difference! I find out all about it when we get to the station-house and I'm put through the third degree by the lieutenant in charge of the precinct. In the first place, I learn that an army officer with the hob-nailed liver has took exception to my educated way of playing poker on the steamer and has sent a wireless concerning me and my mascot, this explaining the reception committee of one at the dock.

Also I grieve to state that my story as to how I came in possession of the Fat Head ain't believed, not by any manner of means. They kindly explain to me that they have a complete description of old Ram Chunder Rao; that the hijeous reprobate, instead of being a mere pack-horse for trouble, is the boss dispenser of all the bad luck with which that poor rummy country of India is afflicted. He has a temple all his own, in which to transact business, and a lot of fat priests to wait on him. His sudden disappearance has created a commotion in that god-fearin' community of something like a billion souls, and the priests what was supposed to guard him are being requested most urgent to produce or prepare for a quick trip to the Hindoo heaven via the hemp route.

"Not guilty!" I says, on hearing this. "Somebody that he's hung a hoodoo on must have got sore and ditched him the drink. He certainly took up with me through floatin' down the Hoogli."

"Is it likely," questions the lieutenant contemptuously, "that, knowin' the value of this idol as everybody in India does, any man would be such a bally ass as to toss the matter of two thousand golden guineas into the river?"

"That's ten thousand dollars," I remarks, "but if anybody thinks that idol is worth anything, they have been kidded. I could cut a better one out of a chunk of Oregon pine with thirty cents worth of knife made in Germany."

Then the lieutenant sneers sarcastic and then and there shows me that them red eyes of that idol is rubies and that the inside of his wicked old carcass is filled with jewels, worth easy ten thousand dollars, it being the custom of the foxy priests, it seems, to use the idols as safe-deposit boxes, knowin' none of the faithful would touch 'em.

"Send me to the nearest home for mental defectives!" I groans, my knees weakenin' at the sight of all this wealth which I have been using so careless like as a war-club.

"I guess that will hold you for awhile," remarks the lieutenant, "that being some of your precious American slang which I picks up at a music hall," he says, laughing uproarious.

Believe me—I don't laugh and they hold me for six months, until they learn that the gent what tore off the temple was a Portugese butler from Goa who, being hotly pursued by the priests, dumps Fat Head into the river as he flees.

Do I get back to the States with the bank roll? I do not.

When I emerge from that prison house I find that the Captain of the *Mogul* has landed and, learning of my temporary abode, has fixed up to charge me with everything from mutiny to murder. What with solicitors, barristers, K. C.'s and the other legal levers used to pry me from my wealth, I land in New York via steerage with just five plunks.

WHAT do I do? Why, seeing it happens to be Friday the thirteenth, I takes my money in hand and gallop to the nearest gaming palace and then and there put that piece of coin on the figure 13, which is the part of the numeral decorations on a roulette-table. The number comes. I let the winnings ride. The number repeats.

"All or nothing!" I remarks to the party with the green shade and the little apron.

She comes again. That's enough. Gathering up my winnings, I walks out and spends a most pleasant though riotous day in walking under ladders, spilling salt, breaking glasses and smashing every Billiken I I can find.

I even hires newsboys to drive black cats across my path, and that night I takes a long look at the moon over my left shoulder and bids farewell to superstition and all belief in luck.

Now I'm what the professors at the knowledge factories call an "Iconeyclast." I play a lone hand, and if I can't win out by my own efforts, I ain't going to turn heathen and put my money on chunks of wood and plaster Paris, and I'm still called Lou the Lucky. Will you have a little somethin'?

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The Wife of Jevan

by Martha Bensley Bruère

IN THE center of Pekin there was, and perhaps still is, a little inn called the Hôtel de l'Empire. It used to be known from end to end of China, and travelers made appointments to meet each other there as they do at Shepard's in Cairo.

"You'd better stop at the Hôtel de l'Empire," a globe-trotting American told us. "You won't feel exactly popular in Pekin anyway; but you needn't be afraid that any yellow face will come up from behind your bed in the night, nor think that you feel a Boxer's knife investigating your vertebræ every time a lamp blows out. And it won't be poison in the food you will die of, either. You will have to walk pretty soft in the streets, but you can stamp around all you like in the Hôtel de l'Empire."

But we were not inclined to "stamp around" much when we reached the hotel, like rabbits scurrying to cover. Why, even the street boys—for all the world as disrespectful as those of Chicago—had heaved clods at all that was left of the Paris hat that had won me consideration clear across Asia! And it was only when the shadow of Jevan Bahoot, the proprietor, fell upon us, that my self-respect revived.

He had mysteriously foreknown our coming, and his manner of welcome exalted us to the blood royal. As he stood before us, grave and stately, with his rich, creamy, Armenian voice telling what an honor it was that we should be his guests, an instantaneous friendship established itself between us, based on his subtle admission of our superiority. Afterward I discovered that this was Jevan's usual way of making friends, but at the time we somehow took it for appreciation of our peculiar personal merit.

"You will find that Jevan Bahoot is friends with everybody in the city," our globe-trotting friend had said. "If any fellow says he has been in Pekin in the last ten years, and Jevan doesn't know him, he hasn't been there, that's all! Why, I guess he must have asked hundreds of Americans when we were going to conquer China. Seems to be his way of flattering us. And you will hear the guests laughing to each other about starting up a war just to oblige Jevan. He is great friends with the Emperor's soldiers, too, and the Boxers. That is why they leave his joint alone, I suppose; and of course it is money in his pocket."

This we realized when our first week's bill came in, for we had been charged a higher price for worse fare than at any other hotel in the Orient. We vowed that, rather than be robbed and ill fed any more, we would go away. But then, without mentioning it to one another, we remembered the sensation of Jevan's caressing tongue. And besides, was he not priceless as a guide?

"He knows all about what you want to see. Why, the priests take him right into

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the Temple and show him things nobody else knows are there."

And we found this recommendation from our traveler to be no less than the truth. Jevan even smuggled us into the Great Temple itself. A young priest showed us around; that is, I think he was young. All Chinamen look about the same age as their idols to me. Anyhow, that fellow did not seem to have been there long enough to know where things were, so Jevan just slipped about quietly and brought out the Temple treasures.

Well, I did not know there were such things in the world! I just wanted to sit down and absorb the beauty of one at a time, forgetting that the others were there. But Jevan would not have it. He kept bringing out more things, and asked me how much the Americans would pay for such marvels in San Francisco, perhaps, or Chicago, or New York. And when I made a guess at the cash value of a jade bowl, Jevan's fingers tightened upon it passionately, as if he could not bear to give it back to the priest.

That protective instinct of his which guarded us in the Hôtel de l'Empire, touched even these inanimate things. Jevan seemed one of those men who must protect something—the type that marries chiefly to give shelter to the clinging vine.

And in the choice of a wife to foster this particular instinct, Jevan had apparently been wise. She was a meek little creature, with an air of pathetic gentleness, who drifted silently about like the slow-moving gossamer. She lived mysteriously, with no apparent responsibilities and no interests except to be treasured by Jevan. To keep her in sheltered idleness was apparently a luxury that Jevan liked to afford himself. The mysterious quiet that walled her in lent a fascination to her, and fixed my attention.

I watched my chance to speak to her, and one evening as she floated unobtrusively through the deserted tea-garden of the inn, I spoke of her husband's kindness and my gratitude for the security of the Hôtel de l'Empire as I might have spoken to an Occidental woman. But our medium of communication was vague, and I was not sure she understood me. Anyway, she did not visibly respond. Still, I must have reached her, for this mere shadow of a woman became sufficiently real to drift into my room at unexpected hours, and to question me about America.

She was inordinately curious about the condition of our women; the tastes and manners of our merchants, how they bought and sold; about San Francisco, the nearest port—she had never seen a ship. Little by little I gathered her story. She and Jevan had lived in a thriving town in Armenia. In one of the Turkish raids two of their children had been killed as the inhabitants fled into the hills. After all was quiet, and the other refugees had ventured back to their homes, they still stayed in hiding. But one night Jevan crept back to see how it fared with his neighbors. He returned to the hills white with fear, and the next day they started eastward with the one child remaining to them.

For a while they had money to hire horses or camels from village to village. After it was gone, they struggled along on foot. Sometimes they begged protection of the camel-train. Sometimes they stopped to earn money on the road. There was no sort of work they had not done, nor any kind of hardship they had not faced in the three years of their journey. They grew used to being hungry and cold and footsore. But the woman, at least, could never reconcile herself to what happened at the outer edge of Persia.

ALTHOUGH they were without money, they had been permitted to sleep in the courtyard of a *khan*, and during the night their one remaining child had disappeared. The people of the *khan* told her many stories. Some said that he had wandered out through the gate into the mouths of the jackals that barked outside all night; some that the camel-drivers, who had loaded their beasts and gone creaking way in the dark, had taken him.

"A jackal is always hungry," they told her, "and the slave-markets are never shut."

The woman was not quite coherent as she told me how she had beaten her hands on the gate, demanding her son; but I gathered that the *khanjee* had laughed at and then threatened her, and that Jevan had interceded with her, saying that the camel-drivers had no doubt stolen the child, and that it was impossible to overtake them. The camel-train still loomed large against the rising sun, when they left the *khan*, but it swung

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over the rim of the desert and disappeared while Jevan protested the folly of pursuit.

At this point there was a break in the woman's story. She grew vehement and confused. References to Jevan were lost in words of incoherent pain. Then more calmly she told me of a year spent with a wandering Kurdish tribe in Tibet, who kept them hanging on their trail, half friends, half slaves, till they stole away in the night and struggled on eastward toward the comparative civilization of China.

It seemed to me that if trouble could unite, Jevan and his wife were certainly bound together, and that the little Armenian woman deserved the life of quiet ease her husband was giving her.

But one morning I came down to the courtyard too early. There was dissension at the gate. The little wife cringed against the gate-post, while the gentle Jevan stood above her.

"I am humble, it is true," he growled. "I am an Oriental; but am I a woman or a horse that I should labor even as the low-born? There is no disgrace for a woman; and if I say an egg is black, you shall say an egg is black, also!"

I stole up-stairs again, and, looking back, saw the woman begin to sweep, while Jevan watched her benevolently.

That evening when she slipped silently into a seat beside me in the garden with an air of disengaged leisure, I noticed that her fingers were calloused and that the joints were red and swollen. Evidently sweeping the gate was not the only work she did before dawn. I gave a new interpretation to her questioning.

"In America, they do as they will—the women? None shall say to them go, or come? And, if a son be taken from them, it may be sold?"

She broke off again in confusion as if about to say what she felt safer unsaid. I answered, with my mind filled with the child lost at the *khan*, the slavery in Tibet, and the hard work at the gate before dawn. My sudden sympathy may have made me exaggerate the freedom of American women. And I did not have time to undeceive her, for the next day a message took us away from the Hôtel de l'Empire.

I often thought of her. Was she still sweeping before dawn? Had she recovered her child? Had she remembered my glowing account of the American woman's freedom?

II

A YEAR after the Boxer uprising, I asked an under-secretary who had been with the American legation during the march of the Allies and the surrender of Pekin in 1901, what had become of Jevan and his wife.

"Did you know, him, too?" laughed the secretary. "Well, it's a great story. Old Jevan seemed to be everywhere. Of course there weren't any foreigners, even at the Hôtel de l'Empire, and he hadn't a thing to do but hang around the markets and the temples. We had to get our war news from him. For months there wasn't any other way. And he seemed to get at the meat of a new situation about as soon as the War Department.

"Oh, yes, he kept friends with all the legations; but we never knew if he wasn't just waiting a chance to sell us out to the Boxers. At first he'd keep asking how long the Embassy could hold out against the Chinese; but after a while, when our troops were pretty near, he seemed to be wondering how long Pekin could stand a siege, and if there was still a way open to the coast.

"Jevan was near the gate when the troops came into Pekin. He waited there until he saw a soldier snatch a gold hairpin from a girl's head, and then he turned and dashed back to the Hôtel de l'Empire. He got him four stalwart coolies who cared neither for priest, Emperor, nor judge. He promised them much gold, laid their hands to a cart, and started for the Great Temple.

"Jevan had been an Oriental all his life, and had lived as a Chinaman among the Chinese; but that day he proved himself of another race. You ought to have seen that city! The whole place was cowed. I couldn't have believed that such a change could come over Chinamen. The priests cringed at their altars, the soldiers broke in panic, the Emperor fled from his palace.

"But as Jevan entered the Great Temple proudly, with his coolies at his back, and began to cull over its treasures with the deliberation of perfect knowledge, he was all a white man. He did not linger for the lesser carvings of the gate. He went straight to the treasure-chambers, where there were balls and bowls and carvings of precious jade; where there was porcelain fired before the Ming Dynasty, and jewels of gold and silver—all, the gatherings of three thousand

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years. These he and his coolies loaded into the cart at the gate.

"At the Hôtel de l'Empire the little Armenian wife received them, and packed them away in the vacant rooms. Trip after trip they made; for a day and a night they looted that Temple, and then they went straight to the Imperial Palace.

"But here the predatory soldiers were before them. Jevan stepped back and watched their unscientific marauding with scorn. Who but ignorant privates from Germany, America or England would snatch at gaudy bits of china, screens set with mock jewels, or modern tapestries, while close to their hands stood the five ancestral tablets of the Emperor?

"These were valuable enough in themselves—they were carved in precious jade, ten inches high; but this was not what made Jevan edge closer and closer to the wall where they stood. For who would not laugh behind the hand at an Emperor whose ancestral tablets hung in another house than his own? Would not these be bought back at any cost? Four of them he had snatched from their setting, when a French soldier cursed him for a thieving foreigner, took down the fifth tablet, and used it to beat Jevan from the Palace.

"Jevan himself did not dare reënter the Palace. But there was really no need, for in the compound of one of the Embassies the relieving army brought together its loot, and every afternoon after the four days of pillage were over, were such auctions of age-old treasure as China had never seen. And day after day Jevan sat under a tree in that compound and gathered in the treasures of Pekin with his savings from the Hôtel de l'Empire.

"For what should Fritz Kalbskopf know of the value of ivory carvings? And would not Michael McDuffy sell the Mother of Spring herself for the price of a pipe of tobacco? Every *yen* Jevan could lay hands on he spent with a sure connoisseurship; and after the sales were over, the Hôtel de l'Empire was no longer a resort for curious foreigners, but a sealed treasure-vault.

"Then the soldiers departed, the Imperial family returned, and quiet settled upon Pekin; but the Hôtel de l'Empire remained closed upon its stolen riches. The way to the coast was clear, coolies to drive carts for hire were plenty, but Jevan stayed on in Pekin. He would slip softly about the streets, wringing his hands and swearing that the foreign devils had stolen all that he had. Wherever men gathered in markets, there was Jevan with his plaint of robbery.

"But the troubles of Jevan ceased to be much regarded when it became known that the Emperor himself had been robbed of the five tablets of his forefathers. It was thought, of course, that the foreign devils had carried them to their kings to show the disgrace of China; but on the chance that they might have been left in the city, the word went round that whoever should bring one of these tablets, to him would be given a great reward and no questions asked.

"THEN did Jevan moisten his lean lips and begin muffled inquiries for an old friend of his, a French soldier, who had come with the allies. He whispered a description of the man into the ears of the sellers in the market; he spoke of him to the girls that sit before the golden screens or sing in the tea-houses. Jevan searched until all wondered at his devoted friendship.

"Then, in an unguarded moment, he let slip the secret that the Frenchman had taken the tablets. At that, all Pekin emptied its devious runways, cleared its subcellars, and sifted its dust-heaps for that lost Frenchman; but not so much as a finger-nail could be found. It didn't do a bit of good to tell them that if the Frenchman had taken the tablets he would probably have them well stowed away on his ship by this time.

"Through the hubbub, an echo sounding in the ears of a rising young favorite, who, like our American statesmen, combined business with patriotism, brought him outside the Wall on a certain night. With all the secrecy of the Middle Ages, Jevan drove a truly Oriental bargain with him for four of the lost tablets.

"'Did you not say,' queried the Emperor's favorite after the bargain was struck, 'that a French soldier had taken the tablets? Did you not set the whole city to spy him out?'

"Jevan bowed low between his upturned palms.

"'Were there not five tablets of the Emperor's fathers?' he said. 'Have I not delivered four into your hands? Did not the French soldier beat me on the head with

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the fifth tablet while I sought to rescue them from the Imperial Palace?'

"And the Emperor's favorite turned humbly away. He himself was only farming out a province or two!

"Jevan did not wait for any government-subsidized thieves to break in and return the price of the four tablets to him whom that price concerned; coolies laden with innocently devised burdens, carts full of humble household packages made their way at unsuspicious intervals to the coast. The wife of Jevan went with the first load, and paid well that she might see each package placed safely in the ship's hold by the hands of her own men. She installed herself in a cabin on board, and the ship came near carrying her away without her husband, for she had not made the Captain understand that the things were not her own, or that any one else was expected. Jevan only reached the wharf at the last moment, having left open the doors of the dismantled Hôtel de l'Empire."

III

IT WAS not until a year after the San Francisco earthquake that I heard of Jevan again. Then I found him in a rug store on lower Fifth Avenue, ostentatiously crowned with a red fez. He greeted me in the same benevolent fashion as in the Hôtel de l'Empire.

"So this is your place, is it, Jevan?" I commented.

"Not even one poor rug is mine—I serve—I have nothing!"

Knowing of the Emperor's ancestral tablets, I looked at him in wonder. And then he explained.

"Should I know that this devil-devised country would make of my wife a devil also?

"'Go, Jevan,' said she, as the ship came to the city—'go and find rooms for the selling of thy treasure. I will pay those that take the customs at the port. Do I not know the value of a *yen*? It may be that there will be less to pay for me, a woman, than for thee.'

"And while I sought rooms for the selling, she hired men of the low-born to store my treasure in buildings close by the water's edge, each bowl of jade safe in its wrappings, each carving of ivory untouched.

"Leaving her to guard all, I went eastward. Should she not in just obedience protect my goods? Had I not with much care brought her to America? Had I left her to the soldiers of the Sultan or to the roving Kurds by whom she was much prized? No! And so I went eastward with a light heart. Here I hired me a room and there a room in which to sell my treasure—rooms in Denver, in Chicago, in Cincinnati—all the great cities to New York.

"Then came a crying in the streets, saying 'San Francisco is shaken into the sea. San Francisco is burned with fire.' And I trembled for the treasures of my gathering. Had I brought riches across the sea only to give them back to the sea again? Then came a message from the consul of my own country, Nasip Asuf—may an old white horse trample on the bones of his grandmother!—saying that my treasure was destroyed, and that none could find her that should have saved them to me.

"One day comes a white woman here to buy rugs, and I, selling, saw hanging from the chain on her neck an earring which had hung in the ear of the Great Temple Buddha. Then when my sight had cleared of the wonder of it, I spoke a little of the rugs she would buy, and made to admire her jewel, and asked her the source of it—this insolence being forgiven me as one foreign to your ways of courtesy. Then she told me of a great selling in the city of Portland, whence she had just come, a selling of jade and of bronze and of all manner of treasure—treasure of my own gathering!

"With haste I went to that city, many days and nights by the locomotive train, finding there only that the treasure had come from San Francisco. I followed again to that city of desolation. For days I searched, asking of the Chinamen who work in that port, speaking to the men who sell cheap wares at great prices to the ignorant.

"At last I found the truth. That woman whom I had saved from the soldiers of the Sultan and guarded with my life in the desert had sold all and fled. And for what had she betrayed me? 'Tell him'—the consul Nasip Asuf, returning from a journey, gave me the message—'Tell him that I go to seek my son; they who gave silver for him will give him again for gold!'"

And as Jevan spread a Shiraz out before me he almost sobbed.

"Not even one poor rug is mine—I serve—I have nothing!"

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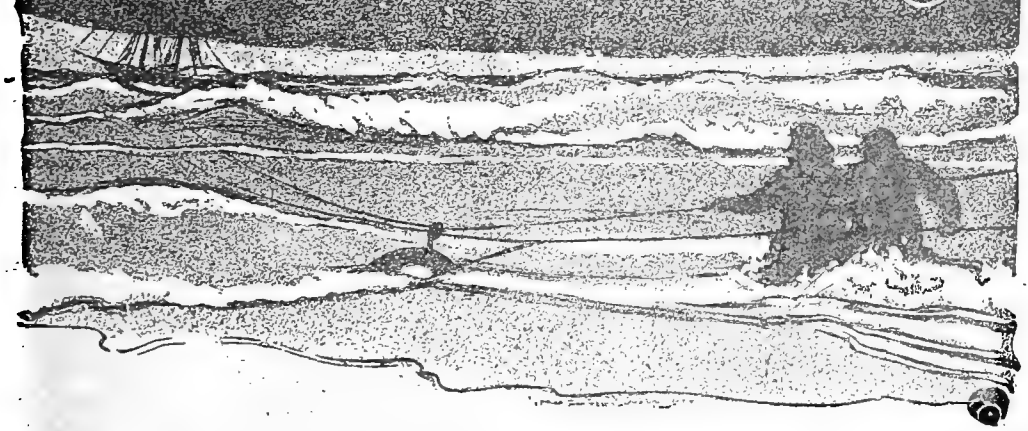
The Two Sisters

Frederick Arthur Domny



I HAD reached the Old Point Station late that afternoon and was congratulating myself on the foresight I had displayed in seeking this comfortable harbor. Outside, a northeast wind howled among the beach hills, and an occasional flurry of white flakes heralded the approach of a snow-storm—one of the old-fashioned kind, no doubt, that meant great drifts lying in the gullies for weeks, an obliterating of all landmarks, and a wearisome patrol for the surfmen.

But, truth to tell, these thoughts lay lightly on my mind. When the brierwood bowl is filled and lighted and soothing clouds of fragrance arise as we contentedly puff away, and especially if one has but just finished an enjoyable dinner and is occupying a chair that seems particularly fitted to his form, with the rail of the glowing stove of just the right height for a foot-rest. Though I could hear the surf roaring and the wind whistling around the corners of the station I was in a mood that rather enjoyed the comparison—the discomfort that reigned without and my own cheering quarters.

"Goin' to be a nasty storm, I reckon," was Keeper Rorke's greeting as he entered the office, pulled a chair up on the opposite side of the stove and carefully proceeded to fill a well-blackened brier. Without waiting for a reply he continued, between puffs, "'Minds me of the night—" *puff-puff*—"that the *Two Sisters*—" *puff-puff*—"piled up on the beach, pretty nigh 'breast of here."

"Yes," I replied, rather mechanically.

While sitting there, I had noticed the model of a full-rigged ship, perfect in every detail and evidently the work of a finished artisan, occupying a prominent position on the top of the Keeper's desk. I knew that this was a recent acquisition and had been about to ask its history, for I have found that these rough, hardy men of the beach and surf have their sentiment, and each possession of this character its story.

"Something new?" I interrogated, with a nod at the model.

"Yes," the Keeper replied; "jest got it a few days ago. It's what you might call a 'souveneer;' an' the funny part of it is that I ain't seen the man who made it an' sent it to me in pretty nigh ten years. You jest heard me say that it was in a storm consid'able like this that the *Two Sisters* came ashore, didn't you?"

I nodded in reply and settled back to await the yarn that I knew was about to be spun.

Keeper Rorke continued:

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WELL, it might strike you as queer, I guess,—seein' that model made me think of it,—but that's the identical image of the *Two Sisters* as she was 'fore she left her timbers on this beach, an' this night is as nigh like the night she struck as two nights could be.

I hadn't had my 'pointment as Keeper over two or three months then an' was wishin'—God alone knows what a fool a man can be sometimes—that I would git a wreck. I was chuck-full of foolishness them days 'bout distinguishin' myself. I could almost see the big black headlines in the papers, "Brave Keeper Rorke and his Noble Work in Rescuin'." Like many other men I was wishin' some poor devils the worst of luck, hopin' to use their misfortunes as my steppin'-stones. I came to my senses, but it was a hard fall.

'Stead of seein' my name in the papers I saw men just as good as I was, an' I dunno but better, drown or freeze to death, while I stood on the beach an' watched them, an' cussed the seas that tore them from the riggin', an' cussed the blindin' snow that had kept them from sightin' the beach, an' cussed myself for my uselessness. I felt pretty bad for a couple of hours, but a man'll git hardened to 'most anything after a while, and I got so I could count what was left aloft with no more feelin' than if they was a bunch of swallers on a wire an' a boy had jest shot one off with his bean-shooter.

I remember I was settin' in here, writin' in the journal, when Gus Smallin', who had the east patrol from sunset to nine, came staggerin' in the mess-room door. "Somethin' 'shore to the east!" was all we could git out of him 'fore he reeled over. We afterwards found out that he had run all the way from the half-way house, a good two miles, an' it's killin' work when a man's loaded with hip-boots an' oilskins an' has two or three feet of snow, an' sometimes five or six in the gullies, to fight his way through. He had heard them firin' a distress gun, and once, when it lit up for a minit, caught sight of the ship jest clear of the outer bar.

Well, we hustled 'round pretty lively an' got rigged up. We didn't have much gear to take, as the surf was full of ice an' usin' the boat was out of the question, so we got the Lyle gun on a sled, with the breeches-buoy an' such like, an' started off.

'Twas blacker'n coal out, but once in a while the snow lit up a little an' then, if your eyes was sharp enough, you could jest make out the white of the seas as they broke on the outer bar. All hands had hold, pullin' the heavy sled, but when we cleared the beach hills an' got the full strength of the gale in our faces I, for one, was more'n half 'fraid that them two miles 'tween the station an' the half-way house with such a load to drag would nigh 'bout tucker us out, an' chances was we'd need rescuin' 'bout as bad as them folks on the wreck.

WE WAS plowin' 'long, makin' mighty slow headway, when there sounded the report of a ship's gun. Every one heard it an' stopped short.

"'Pears to me," I said to Billy Arend, my No. 1 man, who was 'longside, "'pears to me Gus made a big mistake in the bearin' of that wreck. That gun sounded, nigh as I could make out, right off-shore of this spot."

"That's what I thought, Cap'n," Billy says. "She must have worked west'ard since Gus sighted her. That ain't nothin' su'prisin' with this gale, an' as it's runnin' ebb tide there's consid'able set that'd help carry her."

"Guess you're right, Billy," I answers. "She's been poundin' 'long the edge of the bar, workin' this way, an' the only thing to do is to wait till she fastens."

As I stopped talkin' some one yells that he'd seen a light. Prob'ly burnin' a flare, I thinks. Then we all made out a glare off to the south'ard.

"That's her, boys," I said. "The only thing we can do is keep a sharp lookout, 'cause she may be workin' 'long the beach yet, an' soon's day breaks we'll try to do somethin'."

It went 'long for an hour or so, an' then they burnt 'nother flare. They ranged 'bout the same as t'other two an' showed that she was fast, but in that blackness an' with a sea runnin' that was as big as I had ever seen, an' that's sayin' consid'able, there was nothin' to do but wait till we could see to work.

That night, lieutenant, was the longest I ever knew. I've lived on this strip of beach, man an' boy, for nigh on to sixty year; I've seen a hundred wrecks; I've found bodies that have washed ashore weeks after they was drowned, some naked as when they

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was born, with great black an' blue blotches showin' on their skin, marks from bangin' 'gainst floatin' wreckage or poundin' on the hard sand; bodies in such shape that I ain't goin' to try an' describe them, but always there was somethin' I could do. You don't get time to do much thinkin' when you're workin' hard, pullin' a heavy oar in a surf-boat, or mannin' a wet whip-line that sticks in the blocks on the breeches-buoy; your mind is on your job, you're worryin' more 'bout holdin' up your end, doin' your share so the work will be done as it ought, than you are of the folks that's waitin' for you to git them off the wreck.

But it's different when there's a wreck right under your nose, as you might say, an' all you can do is stamp 'round in the snow, keepin' a fire goin' that you know won't do any good even if they seen it, an' waitin' an' waitin' for daylight. You wonder why God ever made such a thing as night so a man can't see to work, an' think, as you hear the surf poundin' on the beach, throwin' up great cakes of ice that smash to pieces as they hit the frozen ground, of them poor devils somewhere off in the darkness.

That time of year it made daylight 'bout half-past five an' I nigh wore the case off my watch lookin' at it. Seemed as though the darned hands was stuck, they moved so slow, but it was kinder encouragin' to know that they was movin', an' as the seconds ticked off I would find myself figgerin' how many was left 'fore the first streaks of light would show in the east.

It hadn't let up snowin' a mite durin' the night, an' it kept blowin' great guns. The wind had hauled 'round to 'bout sou'-sou'east, makin' a bad sea, so it seemed as if our only chance was the breeches-buoy, an' usin' that depended on the distance the ship was from the beach. If she lay close in we could prob'ly reach her, but if she was on the outer bar there wasn't one chance in a thousand of gittin' a line over her, an' our only hope would be that the crew could hang on till it moderated enough to use the surf-boat.

Finally it got pretty light an' once, when the snow seemed to slack up for a minit, Hen Ryder, No. 4, hollered that he seen the wreck. 'Twas only for an instant, but he made out that she was 'way offshore, pretty well iced up an' low in the water, but with masts still standin'.

'Twas 'bout daylight when Sandy Wells, who happened to be cook for the day, comes down from the station with a big pot of coffee an' some san'wiches that I had told him he had better fix up for us. It's mighty cold work standin' 'round on the beach in a drivin' snow-storm, but after we had each had one or two cupfuls of that hot coffee an' a san'wich or so, we felt consid'able better. Then, as it had got to be broad daylight, we had a kinder council on what was best to be done. Didn't look much like we could do anything. Surf too high to use the boat, 'sides bein' so full of ice that she'd never got through it, an' the distance of the wreck from shore makin' the use of the gun impossible.

"The only chance I see," says I to the crew, after we had talked it all over, "is that with the flood tide she'll float over the outer bar an' hit the inner one. If she does, mebbe we can do somethin', but if she don't and lays out there much longer, God help them that's aboard, for we can't!"

'TWAS 'bout the last of the ebb then, an' 'fore long we notices that the tide had begun to rise. It had also slacked off snowin' till we could make out the wreck pretty clear an' see with the glasses that the crew was in the riggin'. She was a sight! Nothing but a big mass of ice, an' so low in the water that every sea broke clean over her.

While I knew, an' I guess all the boys did too, that it was plumb foolishness tryin' to git a line to her, I figgered that it might be done, an' when human lives is at stake it don't pay to let any chance slip, so I ordered them to set up the gun an' git the gear ready in case the shot did reach her.

We put in eight ounces of powder an' bent a No. 4 line to the shot, the biggest charge an' the smallest line used. I stretched out on my belly in the snow an' sighted the gun as acc'rate as I could, givin' plenty of elevation an' allowin' for the wind, an' then, when I thought she was pointed right, pulled the lan'ard.

There was eight pair of anxious eyes watchin' that shot, an' when they see it begin to settle an' fin'ly drop in the surf a good two hundred yard inshore of the ship, it was a mighty silent crowd that laid hold an' pulled the line ashore.

We loaded the gun again, puttin' in the biggest eight ounces you ever saw. I give

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it consid'able more elevation an' let it go. Didn't do no better'n the first time. It wasn't no use; the gun wasn't built to shoot that far in the face of such a gale, an' that chance was gone.

All we could do was wait till the tide rose enough to float her inshore, but playin' a waitin' game, with death havin' all the best of the innin's, is soul-tryin' work. I jest happened to be lookin' at the ship with the glasses when I saw one of the men in the riggin' fall. Prob'ly the poor devil was froze an' couldn't feel it, but when he le' go them ratlines an' dropped, strikin' the iced-up rail an' bouncin' overboard, for all the world like a log of wood, it made me sick. I didn't look for no more of them sights but turned 'round an' kept my eyes on the beach hills.

'Fore long some one hollered, "She's movin'! The tide's raisin' her!" Sure enough it was. She was lungin' 'long, every sea that hit her drivin' her a mite inshore, an' fin'ly one old whopper lifted her clear, an' she wallered into the deep water, 'tween the two bars. 'Twasn't long 'fore she fetched up again on the beach bar, mebbe three hundred yard away, but plenty close to shoot a line aboard, an' you can bet that it wasn't no time 'fore we had one over her!

That un fell bad, though—struck the forestay an' slipped down so they couldn't reach it. We tried another, an' then another, an' the last landed within five or six feet of one of the men in the main riggin'. We felt pretty well satisfied then, for all he had to do was to haul it aboard an' we'd land them all in no time in the buoy, but when he made no move to git it, an' when no one else did either, we looked at each other mighty su'prised.

What kind of sailormen was they, we thought, wrecked an' as nigh death as a man can be, an' not makin' a move to help themselves? I tried makin' motions to them with my hands, signalin' as best I could for them to haul the line aboard, but nary an answer could I get. Of course, I knowed that they was cold an' prob'ly froze up pretty bad, but I could count eight men on the wreck 'sides the one who had gone overboard, an' didn't think 'twas likely that every one was froze so stiff he couldn't move.

While we was wonderin' what to do, we found out pretty clear why the sailor who had the line so close to him had never made a move to get it. His lashin's must have worked loose, I guess, for we saw him grad'ally slip clear of the shrouds an' then pitch down head fo'most. I 'spected him to go overboard like the other one had, but his feet ketched, an' there he hung, the wind bangin' him back an' forth 'gainst the riggin'.

I was gittin' 'bout all of this I could stand, an' for that matter so was the crew. Watchin' men freeze to death 'fore our eyes 'thout bein' able to help them made us nigh crazy, an' when I said somethin' 'bout tryin' the boat, they come mighty nigh cheerin', they was so willin', though any lan'lubber 'd know that it was next door to committin' suicide, la'nchin' in that sea.

So we goes back to the station and gets the boat, an' that was consid'able of a job, but fin'ly we had her bow in the water an' stood holdin' her, waitin' for a chance. Three or four big seas roll in, then comes a spell of fairly smooth water an' I gives the word to shove her in. The boys take hold an' wade out till she floats, then jump aboard, an' set to work at the oars. It was even bettin' we wouldn't make it, but Lor'! when men puts their hearts in their work they can do 'most anything!

Come a little lull in the storm an' we'd gain, mebbe a hundred feet or so, then we'd hold her till the next quiet spell, an' shoot her ahead again. Hard work, you say? It was more 'n that, it was hellish, man-killin' work. My fingers got so stiff that it was all I could do to hang onto the steerin' oar, an' the men—why some of them was 'most froze on the thwarts. Ice there was four inches high on both sides of them an' growin' higher every minit, as the seas broke over us. But we got them, lieutenant, an' that's the main thing. Yes, sir, we fin'ly made the lee of the ship an' got hold of a line.

OF COURSE, by this time we knew that them on board was helpless, so, soon as we'd thrashed 'round a bit to get our blood circulatin', we starts to get 'em outen the riggin' an' into our boat. A couple of the crew would go aloft, get a line fast to one of them men, then, after freein' him from his lashin's, we'd lower him down to deck.

It made slow work, but we stuck to it till we had the last one, even gittin' the body

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of the man who was hangin' head down, and lays them on deck in the lee of the house. Then, while the boys was seein' what they could do for 'em, I thought I'd take a cruise 'round the cabin, 'spectin' to find the ship's papers an' log-book, mebbe, to help out the owners with the 'surance companies.

I was snoopin' 'round down below when I heard the queerest sort of a noise, an' it sounded so spooky-like, it brought me up all a-standin'. I listens a minit, then it comes to me what it is.

"What in time's a woman doin' 'board here?" says I to myself, an' then keeps still again till I locate where the cryin' comes from.

There was a door leadin' off the main cabin, an' in that room I finds the woman, though she hardly notices me.

"Look here, young lady," says I,—'bout twenty-eight or thirty years old I judged she was,—"this is a good place to get out of, an' that mighty quick. Come, go up on deck, an' let me take you ashore."

But she only shook her head an' points to the bunk in front of which she was sitting. I hadn't noticed it 'fore, but then I sees that somethin' was layin' there, all covered up with blankets.

"It's father!" she says, though I could hardly understand her, she was sobbin' so, an' then tells me that a sea had swept the deck, long 'fore the ship grounded, and had carried him with it, till he fetched up, head first, agin' an iron cleat on the rail, knockin' him silly, an' he hadn't come to since. He was cap'n an' owner of the ship, —Hedges was the name— an' she was his daughter.

Well, I finally persuaded her to go ashore 'th us, of course takin' Cap'n Hedges along, an' we made the trip in pretty good shape, shippin' a couple of seas, mebbe, but nothin' to speak of.

You can bet, lieutenant, there was some tall hustlin' done when we struck that beach. The men from the ship was carted up to the station—my crew tended to that, while I gets help an' carries the Cap'n to one of the men's houses—Billy Arend's it was—so's his wife could kind o' tend to the girl, for she was in nigh as bad shape as her father, with the worryin' an' so on.

Ten people we brought ashore, an' all but two of 'em are livin' to this day. No, Cap'n Hedges was in such shape with his head cut bad an' the exposure, that he died in 'bout a week's time after landin' him; an' that seaman who hung in the riggin' so long, we lost him too, but the others come out all right.

'Twas the second mate of the *Two Sisters* sent me that model. He got into some sort of a scrape an' had to have a leg amputated, so now he's livin' in a sailors' home, where he spends his time whittlin' sech things, either to sell or give 'way to his friends.

Yes, the sea's a mighty hard mistress. She takes the best out of a man an' then strands him on the beach, worn out an' useless, sometimes dead. I 'spect I'll get my ticket like many a better man. Some day the surf-boat'll capsize or I'll lose my footin' when at the steerin'-oar on the stern, an' then it'll be a case of all hands here movin' up a peg.

"BUT the girl, Keeper?" I asked, after a short silence during which he was leisurely proceeding to fill his pipe again. "What became of her?"

Keeper Rorke looked at me quizzically a moment, and then laughed.

"She, Lieutenant? I 'posed you knowed that. Why, after hearin' from what folks she had left, cousins or some such relations, who didn't 'pear to be a darn bit anxious to see her, after findin' out that ol' Cap'n Hedges hadn't left a cent of money, not even havin' his ship insured, she kind o' reckoned she'd stay here on the beach."

"But how could she live?" I protested. "There's absolutely nothing she could do, no position she could secure on this lonely strip of sand."

"That's where you're mistook, lieutenant. She did get a pretty fair kind of position, as you call it. Leastwise, she 'pears to be satisfied, an' it's goin' on ten year now since she first took it. If you want to make sure, though, jest walk over to my house an' ask the Missus why she's still on the beach."

And then the Keeper laughed again, and I joined him, for it suddenly occurred to me that there were positions, and most important ones, occupied by women on the beach as well as on the mainland.

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Fighting the TURKS in Macedonia

The Adventures of an Unofficial War Correspondent

by Arthur D. Howden Smith

IT WAS yet early in the afternoon when we left the scene of our encounter with the *bashi-bazouks*,* and the sun had not set as Mileff paused on the brink of a declivity to scan a valley before him with his field-glasses. Somewhere in the midst of that valley or on its edge we knew that Kortser must be lying, because if he had been unable to join us at the time appointed by the *voivode* † on the Dolan road, he would have halted here to await our coming or the dispatch of fresh orders.

But no living signs could be seen in all that vast expanse of tumbled underbrush and woodland. The *voivode* cased his binoculars and blew a long blast on his siren. No answer came, and he tried again. But still no answer came, although the thin, reedy wail of the siren seemed to float away on the air and then return to us, rebounding from the mountain wall that must have been five miles away.

Stepping forward to the brink again, Mileff cupped his hands to his mouth and sent a thundering hail across the wilderness beneath. "Bho-toff!" he called. And again, "Bhotoff!"

Christo Bhotoff is one of the national heroes of the Bulgarians. He was a poet who died in Macedonia at the head of a *cheta*,‡ and his name was used during the revolution as a countersign and password. It will carry surprisingly far on a still day. It carried that day clear across the valley, for after Mileff had called several times we could all distinguish a reply distinct from the echo. Some one, far away on the opposite wall of the mountain, was calling "Bho-toff!"

The *cheta* covered the five miles across the valley in a little more than an hour, and as we toiled, panting, along the farther side, Mileff hailed once more. A reply came back from the mountain above and simultaneously seven figures leaped up from a brush-heap and ran down to meet us. Twenty strong, the reunited *cheta* trot-

NOTE.—Mr. Smith, a young American moved by the spirit of adventure, secured letters of introduction to the Balkan Committee in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, that country being secretly friendly to the Macedonian revolutionists in their struggle against Turkey. He is allowed, at his own risk, to join one of the fighting *chetas* or revolutionary bands. As they expect no mercy from the Turks, each man carries a little package of arsenic in case of capture. In the preceding articles, Mr. Smith has told how the little band wiped out a Turkish detachment quartered in a Macedonian village, wiped out a party of *askares* and ambushed a column of *bashi-bazouks*. It is worthy of note that Mr. Smith was only nineteen years old at the time of these experiences, the Summer of 1907.—THE EDITOR.

* Turkish irregular soldiers.
† Chief.
‡ A band of revolutionary soldiers.

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ted off toward the sunset. The men stepped out bravely, finding time to tell one another all that had passed with both parties. For Kortser and his men had not been idle either.

The march was so much like a triumphal procession that its fatigues seemed nothing to us, and at eight o'clock we climbed down the steep road that leads to Kovatchavishta, already wrapped in darkness. No welcome committee awaited us, because we were not expected; but from the shadow of the first house stepped an immense figure who gripped the hand of the *voivode*.

"Welcome, comrades," he said.

It was Nicola, whom we had not seen since the morning after Osikovo. He took us to the house of his brother-in-law, and we slept there a very long time, for we had been on the march for twenty-six hours, without any food to speak of, and for eighteen hours we had had no water.

It was decided to split the *cheta* into three parties, one to return to Gherman, one leaving for the southeastern part of the *raon*,* and one to wait at Kovatchavishta.

IN THE middle of the afternoon, as most of the *chetniks*† were dozing, a chorus of excited shouts rose from the street below. Whatever else happens in a Macedonian village, the inhabitants never shout unless there is trouble afoot.

In a desperate, hustling mob we pushed through the door of the sleeping-room in which our rifles were stacked. But even before we were fully armed, a shepherd clad in dirty, greasy sheepskins tumbled up the stairs from the courtyard. His face and eyes were wild and haggard, and he panted as he dragged one foot after the other into the room. Like the other harbingers of war I had seen from time to time in this poor, war-stricken land, he seemed to embody in his person all the complex horrors that were rife on every hand.

"*Askares!*"‡ he exclaimed, leaning against the wall for support, his tongue lolling out of his mouth. "*Askares!*"

Mileff pushed his way through the crowd, a mastica bottle in his hand. The man clutched it eagerly without being asked and gulped down a long draught of the fiery liquor. His breath came easier, and he relaxed his grip on the wall.

"I come from Bukovo," he said. "You are Peter Mileff—yes? I have a message for you. The *askares* are marching on Bukovo—many of them, an army. They are going to wipe us out. They have sworn that the village shall burn, and all its people die or starve on the hillsides. We are helpless and we ask for the *chetniks'* aid."

Mileff asked the messenger several sharp questions, and then dispatched members of the Kovatchavishta militia to Gherman and one or two other villages for help. All his orders directed the militia chiefs and any of his own *chetniks* who could be picked up to march at once to the Pass of the Seven Pines, a cleft in the mountains which the Turks would have to traverse to reach Bukovo. The *cheta* marched at once.

We halted on a high spot in the mountains. So black was the night that we could see nothing about us and as we were deadly weary, we lay down and slept; but the first light of the morning awakened us. I could see then that we were at the summit of a narrow, twisting defile which sloped from our feet in either direction.

Dominating the foreground was a group of seven pine-trees at the top of the pass. It was cold at the summit; the chill struck into one's bones. And presently, when a group of men climbed up from the village, I could understand the dreariness of all that surrounded us. They were not panic-stricken, these villagers in their sheepskin cloaks. They did not weep and moan. But there was a certain awful sadness in their eyes that has haunted me ever since.

Mileff spoke to them cheerfully and queried them as to the time it would take the *askares* to arrive, the condition of the roads leading into the village, and the number of inhabitants.

Within the next hour a party of reinforcements arrived, and additional squads of militiamen and half a dozen strange *chetniks* were in by nine o'clock, swelling our effective force to about sixty men, all armed with modern, breech-loading rifles. As fast as the additional squads came up, they were inspected by Mileff and assigned to one or another of the detachments of the *cheta*. He commanded the center, Andrea commanded the right wing and Nicola the left.

Shepherds who were thoroughly familiar

* District.
† Revolutionary soldiers.
‡ Turkish regular soldiers.

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with the hills were sent out to act as outposts while a score of men toiled at the foot of the defile, where it gave on a valley like a mammoth spoon or bottle, piling a rude breastworks of boulders and tree-trunks.

I should say it must have been shortly after nine o'clock when we heard a succession of dropping shots, dying off into silence. Mileff's center was strung across the pass. At one side was Andrea, his men extended up the mountain-side as high as they could climb, and Nicola had disposed his force similarly on the other flank. All the enemy could see of our position were a few boulders and scattered tree-trunks.

The time fairly crawled along. Once, I went up to the summit for water, brought from the valley in large jugs. Stopping a moment beneath the whispering pines, I saw the exodus from Bukovo, that pathetically long, thin line trailing off toward the far-away mountains, and I wondered whether somewhere in its ranks were the unfortunate family who had been the fortuitous cause of all the confusion.

At eleven o'clock we had lunch in the rifle-pits, and in the midst of the meal the firing broke out for the third time, sharper, closer, ringing with a distinctly hostile note. Instead of fading into silence, it billowed and rolled in swelling volleys that played a regular prelude of martial music with the echoes. The spoon-shaped valley before us was quite bare. From beyond its farther wall the firing rumbled with a warning sullenness. And it rumbled louder, louder, always louder.

Suddenly, at a muttered order from the *voivode* in the middle, all up and down the line of men that stretched across the pass you could hear the rippling rattle of breech-blocks opening as the cartridge-clips were shoved into the magazines. Then came the slithering sound of bayonets drawn from their sheaths. The *cheta* was ready! It listened to the firing beyond the farther wall of the valley.

My eyes were fastened upon the pine-trees that bounded our horizon, and so concentrated was my gaze that I did not at first perceive a figure that appeared in an opening of the trees. Its back was toward us; a second one followed it. They raised their rifles to their shoulders simultaneously, and fired at something we could not see. Another man joined them, and then another.

By their dress we knew them for the shepherd sentinels. There were four in the little clump retreating across the valley; there should have been six. Where were the missing ones? Even as we wondered, a fifth man, a sub-chief of militia, hurried out of the bushes at a trot. He ran after his companions, but half-way to them he turned and fired at the trees he had just left. At the same instant, jets of white vapor broke from the trees, and the man spun around again and dropped in a shapeless heap. More jets, coupled with pin-flashes of flame, sprang from the trees and bushes.

It was evident that our outposts needed assistance, but Mileff did not wish the Turks to learn how strong a force they would have to encounter; so only half a dozen of the best shots in the *cheta* opened fire. The range was rather far for the short Mannlicher, but they had some effect.

THE *askare* skirmishers retired temporarily, and the four shepherds panted up the slight incline to report their loss of two men killed. One had died farther back in the hills.

I gasped with surprise when a thin line of skirmishers broke from the trees across the valley, moving at the double-quick. Steel glinted above the red fezes, and the men under them leaped boulders and tree-trunks as lightly as though they had not been marching for hours. Mileff let them come on. He was crouching in his pit, next to mine, a cigarette in his mouth, watching them keenly through his binoculars. His whistle lay beside him, ready for instant use. But he kept silence. We soon saw why.

The Turks came on with utter carelessness, and the *voivode* let them get within easy range before he blew two blasts, the signal for the middle section alone to fire. The *askares* did not even stop to fire back when our rifles spoke. One of them pitched headforward, but his friends kept on. When they were within a quarter of a mile, the firing of the middle section became general. Several *askares* dropped. The rest bunched together and fired a few rounds wildly. They were dropping at every volley and when half of them were down they turned and fled. Mileff let them go unmolested.

Thanks to the smokeless powder, our view

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was entirely unrestricted. We could see the fleeing skirmishers, and the dead and wounded men scattered over the valley. Perhaps we forgot that the fight had only just begun. At all events, we were genuinely startled when out of those same mysterious pine-trees burst a succession of little groups of men who rapidly formed into four separate clumps. A couple of men on horseback galloped from one to the others, and we could hear far-off cheering.

The separate clumps started toward us at a smart pace. For the effect, Mileff had a handful of sharp-shooters open up on them almost as soon as they started. For a fraction of a minute their ranks staggered under the lash; then the clumps marched on.

We had heard them faintly cheering when they started. Now they set up a shrill, staccato yelling that struck us in ferocious waves of sound. "Allah-Allah-il-il-Allah!" they yelled. Their officers had leaped to the front and were leading them with swords drawn. A quiet grin settled on Mileff's face, and he raised the whistle to his lips. He blew one long, quavering note.

All across the valley from wall to wall the volleys crashed. The *chetniks* were firing as fast as they could pull the triggers of their rifles. I heard men beside me praying fervently to the Virgin, to Christ, that their levers might not stick as they pulled them to eject the empty shells. They prayed out loud, and a man down the line cursed through tears when his breech-block refused to work. Crying with rage, he hurled his rifle to the ground, and snatching his revolver, steadied it on the rock before him while he fired shot after shot into the Turks below.

The *askares* had stopped motionless, as if they had come to an actual wall barring their way. It is not an easy thing to press on in the face of sixty resolute men, armed with rifles that fire as fast as one can pull the trigger. All they saw was a succession of jets like steam. Often they didn't see those. Their officers shouted at them, beat them with their sabers, pleaded with them.

They were so near that we could hear them. But it was no use; they turned and fled, and the rain of bullets fell on them from three sides as they ran, pelting through their panic-stricken ranks, spatting on the rocks about their feet, knocking off their fezes and boring their heads. They ran like men possessed.

Some of the more exuberant *chetniks* leaped the wall in front of them and finished such of the wounded as they could get at. This was one of the disgusting features of Macedonian battles, and yet can one blame them? They never had mercy shown to them.

When the *askares* reached the opposite side of the valley they halted. A bit later, Mileff, who never took his eyes off their movements, exclaimed, and following his forefinger I saw a string of pack-ponies emerging from the trees. They looked harmless enough, but a shadow veiled Mileff's cheerful grin.

"It is the mountain gun!" he said. "I had hoped they would not get it over the passes. Now we shall lose some men, Smeet!"

A squad of artillerymen accompanied the ponies, and they set to work assembling the weapon. Evidently, the Turks were going to let the gun do the arguing for a while. Where they had expected to be opposed, at most, by a handful of villagers, they had encountered a large *cheta*, with fortifications they did not know the strength of. And they were not going to take any more chances. It was, by the way, a curious example of the style of warfare that no communications were exchanged by the hostile bodies. There were no cartels, no summonses to surrender. Neither trusted the other sufficiently.

In the meantime sporadic shots were fired by both sides. Several Turks dropped, and one of our men crawled to the rear with a broken arm. Still, a lassitude had been injected into an afternoon that had bade fair to be interesting; the feeling of uncertainty and resultant fear had worn off; and none of us was sorry when the knot about the mountain-gun split apart.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The echoes rolled the length and breadth of the valley. All the firing which had preceded seemed like children's sport, compared to this racket. And it continued without intermission, the artillerymen serving the piece in record time.

FOR possibly a minute I wondered what it all meant and what on earth they were firing at. Strange as it may seem, possibly, it did not seem possible that they could be firing at us. Then I happened to look up. A fleecy white puff-ball was between me and the sun, travel-

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ing toward us. It burst, emitting a cloud of dingy, yellow smoke, and a rain of delicate silver hail sparkled for the barest instant in the sun-rays, then dropped on the rocks of the rifle-pits with a strange, thudding smack. It was a vicious noise, and calculated to make one nervous; but more terrible still was a groan that came from a man up the line of pits as his smashed head fell forward on the rocks.

After ten minutes of this, Mileff decided that discretion was in order, and blew the signal to retreat. The *askares* were already advancing under cover of their artillery, and when they saw the *chetniks* scurrying from their holes they set up a mighty yelling and pursued us hot-foot. Now it was their turn to exult. We doubled a turn in the pass, leaving a picket to hold them back if they pressed us too hard, and took shelter behind the next barricade.

It became so in time that I took grim satisfaction every time I saw an *askare* pitch forward in that funny way men do when they are drilled by high-power bullets. If they don't pitch forward, they fall backward or whirl around and drop in a heap.

At the second barrier the *askares* had rather a knottier problem to solve, although it did not cost them so many men. Instead of charging openly in the magnificent style they had shown in the first assault, they crept up according to modern scientific military principles, in short rushes, one platoon covering its mate.

It was the middle of the afternoon when we abandoned the second barrier, but we had lost a dozen men and we were nearly exhausted. The Turks were even worse off, for the bulk of the physical labor had been on their part. At the third barrier we had a rest of an hour, while they lugged the mountain-gun into a new position on a shelf of the cliff up the pass, from which point it could command the summit. It was evident that they were preparing for the last rush.

And when it came, it came with a ferocity that was greater than anything we had withstood during the afternoon. Our orders were to hold the third barrier to the last minute; but as a matter of fact, the *chetniks* were carried away by the absorption of the fight and got completely out of hand. Instead of abandoning the barricade in time to retreat to our last defense, just below the summit, they persisted in staying behind the rocks and logs until the first of the *askares* came over, pressed on by their struggling comrades behind. In a trice the fighting was hand to hand. For the first time that day the clash of bayonets rasped clear above the short, gasping pants of the combatants and the yells and screams that rose from the sickening mêlée.

Andrea closed with a gigantic lieutenant who came over the barrier in a single splendid leap, sword in one hand, revolver clutched in the other. While they were fencing for an opening for saber or bayonet, Mileff shot the *askare*. Handsome Peter, his beautiful hair flying in the breeze, crossed bayonets with an agile Syrian. It was a case of pure skill, and the *chetnik* won. Individual combats were going on all around me, but Mileff and several of his best men had charged themselves with the purely voluntary task of keeping me from danger, and they saw to it that none of the *askares* came within bayonet thrust of me.

Mileff, himself, was everywhere, his revolver hanging from its lanyard about his neck, his rifle ready for any use, its bayonet reeking with blood, and at intervals his voice sounded hoarse above the tumult, adjuring his men to stand up to the foe—not that they really needed to be urged on. But as a football captain runs along the line of his team, slapping his men on the back with a cheery word for each before the ball is snapped back, even so Mileff fought his *cheta*, using every bit of his personality to get the utmost of effort out of all. The *voivode* accounted for the captain who led the charge, and pistoled one other soldier, I know; and he must have killed many more of the enemy in the course of the fighting.

About this time the mountain-gun commenced bellowing again, and we retreated as soon as we had cleared the barrier of live *askares*. It must not be thought that all this had been done without cost to the *cheta*. We paid for it, and we paid a bitter price.

Whether it was an ironical whimsy of fate, or whether it was simply a tribute to greater skill, I do not know, but the fatalities on our side were mostly among the militiamen. A couple of *chetniks* I did not know were dropped; but not one of the men who had been my comrades in the midnight marches was badly hurt.

In truth, we were a sorry array. Scarcely forty of us were mustered in the line before

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the *voivode*, and not one was without bruises or cut or bullet-hole. Some limped, others had arms in slings, some had bandaged heads. I had a slash across my left hand, got I know not how, a minor injury of no account and only painful because the movement of the hand was affected. We knew that we had all our wounded with us. The missing ones in the pass were not wounded; there was no chance of that. Had the *askares* passed a wounded man by accident in their first mad haste he would have killed himself rather than submit to the certain torture in store for him.

AS WE stood there behind roaring fires, Mileff briefly outlined his plans. They were not elaborate. Two shepherds, Ivan Matkioff and his son Stephen, had volunteered to stay and tend the fires and fling a shot at intervals into the *askare* camp. Just before morning they were to steal away also. Mileff knew it would not be safe to wait any longer. By the following day the *askares* would find some roundabout way and flank us. So we filed off quietly by a side-track through the mountains, heading for Kovatchavishta.

We marched all night, and at intervals detachments of militiamen left us to return to their home villages, weak and weary, their ranks depleted, their bodies limp with fatigue. By dawn we were but twenty strong. All that day we hid in a mountain gully, and late the following night reached Kovatchavishta, to which the news of our fight had gone before us.

They were very good to us in Kavotchavishta—they bathed us and dressed our wounds and gave us food, and women came and sat beside the feverish ones and put cool cloths on their heads so that they could sleep.

Now it goes without saying that the *askares* were furious over the fight before Bukovo. They had lost a hundred men or more, and after paying this awful price they found an empty village to wreak their rage upon. Under the circumstances, Mileff concluded that this particular neighborhood would be unhealthy for him and for all other *chetniks*. Within a few days *askare* patrols would visit the villages in search of evidence of participators in the fight, and a hidden *cheta* would be discovered.

So it was settled that the *cheta* was to march southward, dropping wounded men at such villages as they could be left in conveniently. Kovatchavishta was not judged safe for hospital purposes. This was sad news to me, for it meant the severing of all connections with the Mileff *cheta*. For the next month or so there would be no fighting, and every additional man meant so much additional danger of detection.

The arrangements were soon made. Nicola the courier was waiting, as it chanced, for the arrival of a small *cheta* from Drama, carrying dispatches to Sofia, and I could accompany them across the frontier. There was nothing to do except say good-by.

That very night we were to part, although some of the wounded were so weak that they would have to be carried on ponies. But we made merry notwithstanding, and the single note of gravity came after dinner, when the pails of freshly-pressed red wine were brought in and we filled our tin cups and stood in a circle, as D'Artagnan and his friends stood when they took their famous pledge, twenty or so loyal comrades-in-arms, who had fought arm to arm and thigh to thigh, sharing the protection of the same rock and the last crum in their knapsacks, and among whom there was no guile.

They drank a health to me, and I drank a health to them; then we drank to the fights we had fought, and to Mileff, with his hand on my shoulder. And, at the last, we drank a health to *Makedonia*, that shadowland which exists in dreams.

It was the same, I felt, exactly the same as it had been on the many nights gone by. In the street it was the same. I stumbled over a bumptious cobble-stone, and Giorgi, behind me, laughed his fat, chuckling giggle of amusement. At the corner we paused; Mileff spoke a last word to Nicola, and grasped my hand.

"*Os bogu*, Smeet," he said.

The rest filed by me, one by one, each with a hand-clasp and a muttered "*os bogu.*" A couple thrust little trinkets in my pockets. Then they disappeared in the night, swallowed up utterly.

I never saw or heard of them again. I do not know where they are or what became of them. I have wondered whether, if they were alive when the constitution was wrung from Abdul Hamid, they laid down their Mannlichers and accepted peace. But I do not know. They were swallowed up in the night.

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The Ventures of Captain Doricot

A Tale of the Wisdom of Witless Dick

By H. C. Bailey

HE HAD concluded to call himself Dick Rymingtowne. A name of dignity was needed by a man on the quest of his fortune. By violence or guile or blatant importunity he was resolved to wring that fortune out of the world. He had found it dull to be no more than a shepherd, and he wanted some trinkets to put in the lap of a long, pale-faced child. As for the name—he had no fear of meeting any one who knew that his father had been merely Dick Swineherd; and if he found some aware of that pale girl in the Berkshire manor-house whose name was Mary Rymingtowne, it would be an entertainment for them to wonder what in the world he had to do with her.

He came into the alehouse at Calne all wan with chalkdust, like a great ghost. You see him sprawling, loose-limbed, ungainly, on the black oak settle, while they put before him a quart jack of strong beer and a platter of beechwood laden with a pound or more of beef. He had to pay as much as twopence, for it was the year that Cranmer went to his death, a year of high prices. But Dick always was kind to his body.

While he ate and drank—his manners were tidy but not beautiful—there came in a handsome fellow who called for sack. The alehouse kept no foreign liquors and its hostess said so haughtily, and the handsome gentleman had to content himself with ale. Which he might have expected. And why, if he had a taste for sack, did he come to the alehouse? So Dick's mind communed with itself, while his large mouth ground down beef noisily. When he drank he looked sideways.

The gentleman had a handsome, feeble face, like a stained-glass saint, and golden hair that curled below his ears. He was in black velvet above his riding-boots, with a

NOTE:—In the September ADVENTURE there was a story called "Black Magic," with its scene laid in England just before the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The hero was of a kind new to fiction—Dick, a hulking lout of a Berkshire shepherd, generally regarded as a bit lacking in his wits. But the reader gradually sees that Dick is very far from lacking in his wits. Hidden under his stupid manner and appearance is a master mind in craft, generalship and knowledge of human nature. In "Black Magic" Dick cleverly saves Gabriel Rymingtowne, lord of Assynton Manor, from the murderous plot of a relative who covets his estates and his daughter. It becomes evident that Dick loves Mary Rymingtowne. Therefore he goes forth to win his fortune, and the reader has a hint of stirring future adventures on the high seas. In the present tale, complete in itself, he meets with a man destined to play a leading part in his life.—THE EDITOR.

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collar of silver lace. There were stains and flayed places that gave him an air of picturesque dilapidation. Dick wondered what might be the use of him to this world. The handsome gentleman had no interest in Dick. His whole intelligence was plainly devoted to expecting some one else.

A purple hat and a purple cloak swaggered in. From them emerged a lean little man, brown as a nut, with queer pale eyes, His doublet was purple; his hose slashed with gold and purple. He flung hat and cloak on Dick's table and himself on Dick's settle with a shrill: "Avoid thee, rustic!" as he wiped his boots on Dick's arm. Dick shrank humbly away and pulled his forelock and took the rest of his beer at a gulp and shambled out. He heard the shrill voice demand double ale as he went.

But he had no intention of leaving them to themselves. Gentlemen so splendid would never be in an alehouse unless they had some queer business. If they wanted to be secret, there must be profit in them. And the little man pleased him.

They heard his heavy shuffle pass away down the street. "*Basta*, a good sheep, that!" said the little man and drank. They did not hear him turn off and circumnavigate the alehouse to come back again. Under the shed at the side he halted. He was out of sight from door or window, but through the unglazed lattice windows their voices came to him clear.

"Well, Tony, my bully," quoth the little man, "the thing marches. Old hunks hath sold his wool and now is pouching the gold."

"How much, sir?" Tony cried eagerly.

The little man reached up and tweaked his ear. "Booby, what do I care? 'Tis but a sprat to catch our whale. Have you forgot your orders? Repeat them, sirrah!"

The handsome face was sulky. "Jump out on him and crack his crown. When he comes to, swear that we have rid up just in time to drive off two bloody fellows who were robbing him."

The little man reached up and pulled his nose. "Antonio, my Cupid, I'll teach thee to remember orders if I have to carve them on thy skin! Where did I bid thee wait him, gosling?"

"By the withered oak under Long Down," Antony muttered.

"So. Carry on, then. And if there's a blunder, my bully, I'll slit thy pretty nose to shreds. So here's to the venture and a full hold of the spices of Bengala!"

Dick heard them moving and moved swiftly. When they came from the alehouse yard with their horses he was in a shop spending a halfpenny on whip-cord. He saw a chance that it might be useful. The two gentlemen, it was plain, were going to waylay an old man with money on the road by Longdown, and Longdown was between Calne and Chippenham. Towards Chippenham Dick made the best of his speed.

IN A WHILE he saw the little lean man before him, riding at an easy pace, and he checked and was careful not to be seen. But the handsome, dilapidated Tony was not to be seen either. So the two gentlemen had parted company. Dick directed his large ingenious brain to consider how they were to carry out their benevolent plan, and what was meant to be its issue. And his face was all stupid and still more stupid, after its habit when thinking elaborately. They were to knock their man senseless and stand by him till he got his wits again and then swear that they had saved him from naughty rogues. The notion appeared to Dick delicately humorous and therefore he looked more loutish than ever.

But why not take the old fellow's money and have done with him? Plainly because they hoped to get more out of him by posing as his saviors. These were gentlemen of large ideas. And what were they? Not the common rogues of the highway. Not gentlemen born, either. They lacked the air and their speech was queer. Mighty queer. What was that about "a full hold of the spices of Bengala?" It sounded like apothecary's talk. But he did not conceive that little lean man an apothecary.

Dick plodded on three miles, always two turns of the road behind the little man, and they came in the shadow of Longdown. There was the withered oak of the plan, a grim, gray shape stretching skeleton arms. The little man jogged on slowly and still more slowly. Dick left the road and took to the down, using each fold of the ground with a shepherd's skill to hide him. He climbed high enough to watch the road for a mile back and waited.

In a little while he saw Tony riding fast,

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an ominous black cavalier. But suddenly, as he came by a lane-end, Tony vanished. He must be waiting his man there, half a mile short of the withered oak. The plan had gone awry. Dick's heavy face became of a lifeless stupidity. He saw the little man halt and look back again and again, and at last wrench his horse round and canter back to the oak. He was restless in the saddle. Dick could feel him swear.

The situation was altogether delightful. Dick chuckled and heaved himself up and went swiftly on a course that led him across the lane where Tony waited and down to the highroad beyond. But he halted in the ditch.

You see the landscape: a winding white road through rough meadows with wild hedges and scattered trees, and to the southward the billowy, gray-green slopes of the down; there is no life in it but some sheep and the three men expectant at their several stations.

Another came into the picture, a pursy fellow on a bony cob. From his ditch, Dick saw white hair and a red face with deep lines about the mouth. He came level with Tony, unsuspecting. Tony broke out from the lane and drove a pistol-butt down on his skull. He was a shapeless heap on the road. His cob staggered and found its feet and cantered off. Tony was down beside him, fumbling in his clothes, plucked out a plump little leather bag and sprang to the saddle again.

Dick understood. The dilapidated Tony was improving on his master's plan for his private good. Dick felt it capable of further improvement. Before Tony had mounted he had darted across the road and back again to his ditch. As Tony came galloping with the booty he was invisible. Invisible, too, against the white road was a double ply of whip-cord knotted firm from tree to tree.

Tony's horse found it and came crashing down. Tony was hurled on and met the ground with a thud that satisfied Dick, who came out of his ditch on the instant, rolled the limp heap over and took from it the leather bag. This he put in his bosom and, careless whether Tony, now much more dilapidated, were dead or alive, he turned and made off. But before he went he untied his whip-cord and rolled it into his pocket. He disliked waste. So he went on toward the old man who was robbed and the little, lean man, leaving Tony and Tony's horse upon the road.

Now, since this road was level and winding, and the little lean man was some way off from the nearer of the two robberies, he saw neither of them, and his first chance of guessing at anything came when the old man's frightened cob broke into view. With a rolling Spanish oath he cursed Tony for a fool. He spurred forward, caught the cob and jerked it round and made haste—the cob was neither willing nor speedy—to seek his master.

In the middle of the road the old man lay, plain enough. But Tony was not to be seen. Swearing with mellow eloquence, the little man rode on. He could not guess that the noise he heard faintly in the distance was the noise of Tony's fall. He was not yet sure what Tony had done, but the flow of his profanity was more than adequate. However, he kept to his plan. He sprang down to help the victim and tenderly was raising him when the victim sat up and stared and muttered: "What is it? Where be I?"

"In parlous hap, save for my coming, good sir! Hath the villain wounded thee?"

The old man blinked narrow eyes at him. "And who the fiend art thou?" he said sourly.

"Good sir, thank God for Captain Nicholas Doricot." He held out his hand to help the old man up.

But, watching him with malign eyes, the old man began to feel in his pockets. "Captain Nicholas Doricot!" he repeated in a small, contemptuous voice. "I ha' been robbed, Captain Nicholas Doricot."

"*Diablo*, I feared it!" quoth Captain Doricot with a frown, and his pale eyes glinted down the road after the vanished Tony. "If I had caught the knave!" he muttered, and there was no doubt of his honest anger. He stamped and his brown face was pale. For the gosling Tony to dare cheat him and get well away was plainly intolerable. Then he commanded himself. "A most damnable vile rogue, sir!" he cried in his shrill voice. "And you may thank me that he robbed you of no more than your purse. But for Captain Doricot, my friend, you were dead as salted herring!"

"Thank you, quotha! No thank you!" the old man snarled. "Here's I get knocked o' the head and stripped and find you stand-

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ing over me to bid me thank you! I'll thank you for my money!"

Captain Doricot kept his temper. "Good father, when I hove in sight—'twas your cob coming past me with no man on him that made me turn back—when I hove in sight there was a black fellow over you with a knife quick to slit your weasand. He fled before me—there are not many will abide Doricot's sword." He pulled it half out and slammed it back with an air. "Call me your salvation!"

The old man got on his feet. "Salvation, to be sure! Where's my money?"

"Now beshrew thee for a thankless soul!" cried Doricot with honest indignation. "Is money more to thee than life?"

The old man stared at him and sniffed.

AT THIS moment Dick came plodding along. He did not seem to see them till he was close upon them. Then he gaped, but, gaping, shambled still on his way. "Here!" the old man called. "Where are you from?" Dick stood still and gaped at him. "Where are you from, my lad?" the old man repeated, coming toward him.

"Out o' Calne, I be. And what be that to you, if you please?" Dick drawled.

"Calne? Have you met ever a man on the road?"

"You'm free with your questions," Dick grumbled.

"Come, good fellow," quoth Captain Doricot, "hath any man passed you on horseback?"

Dick swung round and showed him a large gaping mouth.

"Now, my lad, speak out!" the old man cried. "Have you met ever a man on the road?"

"Oh dear, oh dear, and who'm you at all?" Dick opened dull, stubborn eyes.

"I am Job Hartop of Coldarbour," the old man swelled. "Go to, answer me, fool!"

"And what was you asking?" Dick drawled, and when the question was vehemently repeated he scratched his head for a while. "I mind there was a man a-galloping a way back. Not so far neither, nor yet so near neither, as you might say."

"With a black cloak to him, good fellow?" cried Doricot.

"Ay, he was a black un, so he was. Do you know un?"

With a ferocious oath, Captain Doricot consigned the dilapidated Tony to hell. Mr. Job Hartop turned upon him. "And prithee, what have you to swear about?" he said sourly.

Captain Doricot struck an attitude. "Remark me, Mr. Hartop! I am a man whose honor it is to achieve everything that I essay. I have here failed. I have saved only your life, less use, as you rightly conceive, than your money. Therefore I condemn myself. And if ever I find your black friend I will cut out his vitals for my consolation! *Diable de moinillon!* I have spoken!"

Dick stared at him and gave a stupid guffaw.

Captain Doricot sprang forward like a cat and pulled his nose. "You laugh, good rustic, you laugh, I think! There's a joke fit for thy wits! *Via!* Away!" He swung round upon Mr. Hartop, who was glowering. "Come, sir, you are shaken. I will escort you to your door."

Mr. Hartop turned upon Dick, who stood blowing his nose. "If I was your age, my lad, I would ha' knocked him down."

Dick guffawed again. "Dearie me, 'tis too little a man for me to hit. I had a jackdaw to Assynton hopped and tweaked like he. I called un Shortlegs." He pointed at the little, lean shanks of Captain Doricot, who sprang to the saddle and sat there royally.

"The next time, rustic, thy nose will be slit!" said he. "Come, Hartop, let us ride."

Mr. Hartop eyed him. "Look you, Mr. Shortlegs, methinks the roads were safer before you came," he said. "And I'll find them safest now if you ride before me."

"What, sir? Do you impute?" Captain Doricot walked his horse forward. "Do you insinuate? Speak plain, I entreat!"

Mr. Hartop withdrew behind the bulk of Dick, who stood firm, grinning, swinging his ash staff.

"Go your ways," said Hartop nervously. "So they be not mine."

Captain Doricot laughed. "Who knows, my Crœsus? All ways are Doricot's. If thou art wise in time and waking gratitude bids thee seek him, ride to the Bull in Chippenham. To our meeting!" He turned and spurred off.

Mr. Hartop stared after him, pale and dazed and muttering something. Then, turning, he plucked earnestly at Dick's sleeves. "My good lad, my good lad, give

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me company to Coldarbour and it shall be worth thy pains." Dick laughed.

Mr. Hartop's cob was ready enough to go at a walk and indeed kept lagging behind. Mr. Hartop, with brief intervals, beat him importunately and in that seemed to find consolation for his disaster and his anxieties. Once he spoke to Dick. "That's a nasty little hornet of a man. Hadst ever seen him before, my lad?"

Dick's gaping face was answer enough. Mr. Hartop went on beating his cob.

Dick enjoyed himself. The memory of the cunning Tony's overthrow and the impotent ravings of Captain Doricot was sweet, but not so sweet as Mr. Hartop's choosing for his protector against thieves the man who had the stolen money in his shirt. Humor of that kind always delighted Dick. As for giving the money back to Mr. Hartop—the idea of such pedantic honesty never occurred to his innocent mind. He did not like Mr. Hartop's manners. Of all the men who had engaged his attention that day he preferred the little Captain Doricot. He desired to know more of Captain Doricot, whose bearing suggested greater schemes than the bleeding of Mr. Hartop.

II

COLDARBOUR farmstead stood a mile or less out of Chippenham. Its barns and byres were tumbling down and there was about it little sign of life or work. Plainly Mr. Hartop's farming was a matter of sheep and their wool, which in those days meant rich profits and the ruin of the countryside. Dick knew the trade, and his lack of love for Mr. Hartop froze into something harder.

As they turned into the yard, a young woman came up quickly. She was handsome, in a dark, full-blooded fashion, something too plump, like Mr. Hartop. She stared with her hand to her bosom. She seemed out of breath. "Uncle—why—you—you be late, ben't you?" she stammered.

"You are a fool!" Mr. Hartop snarled. "Take the cob in."

She grew pale and flushed, and tugged the cob off in a hurry.

Mr. Hartop turned to Dick and twisted his mouth into a smile. "I'll not need you more, my good lad. Good night to you."

"Here, come now!" Dick cried. "Said as I should ha' some'ut for my pains, master."

Mr. Hartop's smile vanished. "Come in, sirrah," he snarled and led the way to the square stone house. In the big bare kitchen the smallest of fires glowed. Mr. Hartop took a small mug to the beer-barrel and watched the trickling spigot with anxious care. "There's for you," he said as though it were nectar.

Dick swallowed and made a wry face and spat. "I be robbing they pigs o' yourn," he said humbly and put the mug down.

Mr. Hartop sneered. "Thy stomach is too nice for me, sirrah! Take it away. Thou greedy knave!"

Dick gaped. "I was going to tell 'e some'ut," he drawled. "Some'ut as you ought to know."

Mr. Hartop's face changed. He imagined something of his loss or Captain Doricot. "What then, my good lad?" he cried nervously. "Come, speak out!"

"Give I a shilling," Dick whined.

Mr. Hartop stared at him and after much fumbling in his clothes pulled out a groat.

Dick snatched it. "Y' ought to know you'm a stingy old hunks," he said with a grin.

Mr. Hartop struck at him and hit the door-post. Mr. Hartop called an oath after him.

Dick laughed as he crossed the yard. Then he looked at the groat and shook his head over it. "You'm none so much to laugh at," he grumbled. He was angry with Mr. Hartop for being no use to him. The knowledge that he had a bag of Mr. Hartop's money was in no way soothing, for he had come by that without Mr. Hartop's assistance. An ungrateful, stingy old hunks.

So he was lamenting his wrongs, when he saw Mr. Hartop's plump niece in an interesting position. She was by the side of the barn, out of sight from the house, and she stared eagerly, anxiously down the road toward Calne. She did not hear Dick's step till he was close upon her; then she started more violently than was reasonable and stared in a fright.

"Give'e good night, mistress," said Dick stolidly.

"You are going!" she cried. "Oh, are you going?"

"I ben't axed for to stay," Dick drawled.

"Why did he bring you? Where did you find him? Tell me! Has he been robbed?"

Dick gaped at her. From the house Mr. Hartop sounded petulant and angry. "Ta-

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bitha! Lazy slut! Tabitha!" She fled and Dick shambled off.

But as he went, it was borne upon him that he had not done with Mr. Hartop yet. He trudged on toward Chippenham till he was well away from Coldarbour farm. Then he turned aside and under hedgerows made his way back and sat himself down where, unseen, he commanded house and yard, and pulled out a cake of gingerbread. He had always a sweet tooth.

His unsentimental mind was giving Tabitha an ill name. She was of course too plump for him and that made him suspicious. He set down against her a loose mouth and yearning eyes. But for all that he might have called her nothing worse than a baggage. He had felt something in her expression and her bearing that he condemned for noxious. You may wonder by what right he made himself a judge. But Dick always had his moralities.

What Tabitha's passions might demand, interested him much. For plainly Tabitha had some business in hand. Why else should she watch the road and be anxious for his going? And perhaps Tabitha knew something more than she ought. Or why should she fancy that her uncle had been robbed? Dick chuckled soberly. The world was full of joy. . . .

The sun sank into a lake of gold. Down and vale grew vague in lavender twilight. Dick watched still, and once and again he saw Tabitha come out and peer down the road. But there was no one upon it. Light and color faded. In a cloud-strewn sky the stars stood clear. For a little while a candle glimmered in the farmhouse. Dick saw it move from window to window and heard the groan of bolts. Then all was dark silence. And still Dick watched.

IN A LITTLE while he heard a horse coming from Calne. It halted some way off. Then from near at hand Dick heard an owl hoot. He stole along the hedgerow. Close in the gloom of a patch of osiers, a man stood waiting. His face was not to be seen, but he had the height and pose of the handsome dilapidated Tony. Dick grinned through the dark. He was just the man for Tabitha to choose.

A rustle and scurry and Tabitha came. She flung herself upon the man and kissed him fiercely. "My dearie, my dearie, and me half mad with fright! Oh, what's come to thee at all? Tony! Art not hurt?"

"Every bone in me is bruised! What's come to me? How do I know? What's come of old Hartop?"

"Why—why, but the old beast was caught? He's raging over his lost money, like the miserly old devil he is. Tony! Sure, the money's safe, dear lad?"

"Rot me, if I know if my head be safe! I ha' been trapped, Tib." She clutched at him. "I had the old devil's bag and was safe away—no sign of Doricot—and down goes my horse and when I come to myself I have not a stiver upon me. Oh, I'll swear it's a trick of that fox Doricot!" Tony swore at him vehemently.

"The beast! The beast!" Tabitha sobbed, and clung to him. They gave some time to grief and rage. Then Tabitha began to caress her man. "Tony, dear lad, let's begone. We'll not——"

"Begone, quotha!" cried Tony. "How can I take thee without a shilling? I have none, nor know where to turn for one, thanks to this pretty plan of thine. Would I had had the sense to stand by the Captain! Never a man prospered by crossing him yet. Oh, he hath the fiend to his comrade! Who could——"

"Tony! Tony! There is a way yet. Oh, I hate thee for fearing that little foxy man! Dearie, thou art man enough for a dozen o' his make! And there is a way, my heart. The old miser hath plenty more. Why, there be five hundred pound to his strong-box! Look 'e now, my dear, wait a while till the old rat be a-sleeping—he hath but just gone to his bed and he's fidgetty. I'll draw the bolts and you may come in and master him. Then we'll away with more than we ever hoped, my dearie." She kissed him eagerly. "Why, Tony, I'll make thee rich as a lord! And if the old rat do get hurt, why, there be none will find him till the shepherds come down to the farm o' Saturday."

From the farmhouse came Mr. Hartop's peevish voice: "Tabitha! Tabitha!"

Tony started back. The woman laughed. "Never 'e fear, my dearie. He thinks I be down the yard. I told un I heard some'ut at the chickens. Wait now, wait a while. He'll be snoring within the hour. I'll come to the door for 'e." She scurried away.

A moment Dick lingered to see if the handsome Tony would obey her and wait. Tony slunk away to his horse. But it was

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only to see that the beast was firmly tethered and in a moment he came creeping back to the farm. Dick stole off.

There were, you see, many things which he might have done. What simple virtue demanded—to warn the wretched Hartop—was the only one that never occurred to him. He might, as in the morning, have waited till Tony had done his work and then robbed the robber. But his morality boggled at that. He had indeed no more affection for Mr. Hartop than for a sheep whose carcass was to feed him, and yet, by the thought of the old man being butchered to help such a girl to such a lover he was disgusted. The creatures were nasty.

But if he had to meddle, he meant to help himself as well as damage them. And so he made for Chippenham at a run. He proposed to engage Captain Doricot in the affair. He wanted to know more of Captain Doricot. And even if there were no profit in him, it would be amusing to set him upon the dilapidated Tony. Dick was always likely to be governed by a sense of humor.

He looked a man who could not move quickly. He always arrived at need without haste. Not much time passed before you see him, warm indeed, but with plenty of breath, reconnoitering the Bull Inn. It was possible that Captain Doricot, when he gave that address, never meant to be found there. But if he were thus evasive, there was still time to get back and deal with Tony single-handed.

DICK liked the Bull's kitchen. It blazed light from half a dozen candles, so that the shelves of crowded pewter flashed and shone. A gay fire crackled on the hearth, and from the turning spit a savory smell spread wide. The rafters bore a notable harvest of hams and smoked beef and mutton, onions and dried herbs. Never was a place more genial to a stomach of large ambitions. But it held something that appealed to Dick's nobler parts.

Three or four good burgesses sat jolly over their mulled ale, rolling and nudging and chuckling as they listened to the intoxicating rhetoric of a certain shrill voice. For there, with the buxom, red-cheeked hostess on his knee, there sat Captain Doricot. Dick watched through the window a moment and then stole round to the door.

What he heard was after this fashion—

"Now were we close upon that land whence Dan Paris of Troja did steal Helena, which was the most beautiful woman that was ever, and lives still in Egypt, as they say. But that's heathen. I ha' seen the women of seven and fifty diverse nations, and kissed here and there, God wot! And before them all, give me my English sweetheart, round and sweet as an apple!" He kissed the good hostess roundly, and there was laughter and the clinking of pots.

"The galliot came close upon us, so that we could see the naked slaves chained to their oars and the boatswain which walked among them and beat them. A hellish sight, being a heathen master of Christian men. But the knave's hour was at hand, for that his false prophet, Mahound, had tempted him to attack Nick Doricot. Whenas he sought to strike us amidships, I laid alongside him and therewithal leaped upon his forecastle, where their fighting men are, and incontinent slew their captain, which was a Bassa, and, as they told me, ate glass to his dinner. My good lads, following me, laid so about them that, in a half-hour, of the Turks no man was left and the slaves a-wailing to us as if we were God's angels.

"Now, look you, this galliot did stink so of sweet savors that when the heat of the fight was past, we were near fainting for too much delight of the fragrance. And in her we did find an hundred and three and thirty bags of clove and cinnamon and ginger and pepper, and what was more joyous than all, in a box of sandalwood a purse of cloth of silver, wherein was of rubies a full score. Ay, as large as your eyes, sweetheart, though not brighter. The which brought a twenty thousand pound to the merchant venturers which found the money for our voyage. *Diavolo!* He ventures wisely, who ventures with Nick Doricot! When I sail next, I wager the *Toby*——"

Dick had heard enough. He knew his man now. He flung open the door and slouched in and stood gaping. The buxom hostess laughed at him. "Well, my lord, what's your will?" quoth she.

Round her large comely shoulder appeared the lean brown face of Captain Doricot. His pale eyes flickered. Dick looked hard at him. "'Here's to the venture and a full hold of the spices of Bengala,'" he drawled. "And will 'e come now and cut his nose to shreds?"

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There was amazement in the kitchen. But Captain Doricot kissed the hostess blandly and set her down on her feet. "The good booby hath an errand to me, I think." He strutted across the floor, caught Dick and swung him round and with a kick dispatched him through the door.

Outside in the dark, Dick felt the lean hand cruel upon his arm. "You spy, do you, sirrah? You listen?" said Doricot. "When folks listen and spy, I am apt to make them dumb!"

Dick chuckled. "You'm a funny lad. You as would give your ears to know what I can tell."

Captain Doricot drew away from him and looked him up and down. "*Madre Dios!* I begin to believe it's a man!" quoth he. "Now what is your game, my lad?"

"That's more nor I know," Dick laughed. "But you'm wasting time to fumble after me. Now I heard you and Tony Smugface in the alehouse. I saw him knock the old man over and go off with the bag for hisself. I had half a mind for to give the old un the truth about you, but you was rare good sport and when I took us home, he had no more nor a mug o' small beer for I, so I told nought. Then, as I was coming away from his farm, I see Tony Smugface sneaking up and I went behind the hedge. He stood away off and hooted and the old un's niece sneaks out to un. She'm a bad piece. They was hugging and kissing and planning for to make an end o' the old un and go off together with all his moneys. She'm to let Tony Smugface in so soon as the old un's asleep." He paused and chuckled again. "I thought as 'twould pleasure you to speak a word with Tony."

Captain Doricot left him standing alone in the yard and came back with a horse. "If you would see sport now, come hold by the stirrup!" he cried. Dick laughed and ran. All the way, Captain Doricot murmured to himself a gentle rhythm of strange oaths.

III

BEFORE they were near the farmhouse Dick slid his hand to Doricot's thigh. "Whoa, now, whoa," said he. "The horse will scare un, maybe. Bide you here, and I will go on and see what they be a-doing." Captain Doricot drew rein. Dick stole on through the dark.

The farmstead was gray in the gloom, with a glimmer of light from one curtained window. Where Tony had been lurking there was no Tony left. Dick crept to the house. A clattering and yell upon yell announced that Tony was about his business. Dick ran back to the road and whistled. Captain Doricot was upon him in a moment. Together they made for the house again and Captain Doricot laughed as he came.

The door stood open. The great kitchen was all dark save for a red glow from the hearth. Overhead sounded the noise of a scuffle and the voice of Mr. Hartop. The two fumbled their way to the stairs. Captain Doricot went up like a cat.

The bedroom of Mr. Hartop was in much disorder. It seemed all sheets and blankets and wrestling and yells. A moment Doricot stood in the doorway, smiling upon the scene. One glittering candle gave it light. In the midst, old Hartop, ridiculous in his bedgown, wrapped himself about the dilapidated Tony, gripping and clinging with arms and legs. Tony writhed and staggered, clutching at him, trying to take him by the throat. The old man was a heavy burden and had a desperate strength. Tony's drawn sword was caught between their limbs, impotent, or an equal danger to both. The old man screamed and Tony gasped out oaths at him.

Behind them, as they reeled, mad in hate and fear and ludicrous, Tabitha hovered. Through the noise she screamed her lover's name and, darting in, plucked the dagger from his belt. She drew back. Her face was pale and vile with passion. She raised her hand to strike at the old man's back.

Captain Doricot strutted in, smiling. "Fie, fie, my pretty!" he said, and caught her elbow in such a grip that she shrieked and let the dagger fall. He put his foot on it and, reaching over Mr. Hartop's shoulder, flicked his fingers into Tony's eyes with a placid, "There, gosling, there."

That, or the mere sight and sound of him, melted Tony's strength. Tony went staggering back and fell with Mr. Hartop upon him. When Tabitha would have started to help him, her arms were seized from behind. She looked round to see Dick's heavy face grin at her.

Captain Doricot plucked out a lace handkerchief and dabbed delicately at his nose. Then he strutted across to the heap on the

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floor. Mr. Hartop, while he still dug his nails and knees into Tony, was turning an amazed face to stare. Captain Doricot put his foot on Tony's neck and tapped Mr. Hartop's quivering shoulder. "Mine ancient," said he, "you sweat. Get you to your blankets. Else will an ague rob the world of your charms. To your blankets, go. I will look to this rat."

Tony made no move to help himself. He lay gasping and looked up at Captain Doricot with the eyes of a thrashed cur.

Hartop plucked his sword away from him and with it helped himself to his feet. "Murderous, thieving knave!" he panted, and broke out into a cruel laugh. "I'll see thee dance on the gallows for this!" And he pricked at Tony with the sword and laughed again as the man writhed. Then, with a snarl, he swung round upon Tabitha, who stood quivering in Dick's grasp. "And that vile wench of thine, she shall burn! Ay, it's the fire for——"

"*Pauca verba*, mine ancient!" piped Captain Doricot's shrill voice. "To thy blankets, go! These rats be in my trap."

Hartop turned about with his bedgown fluttering. "And how came you here, sir?"

"Oh, an it please you, we will be gone again and leave these rats to eat you. What's your will, señor?"

"I meant no offense, sir," Hartop cried anxiously.

"Then give none. Which is, being interpreted, hold thy peace. Now will I tie up these true lovers." He stooped to take Tony's sword-belt.

But Dick, trusting the woman to one hand for a moment, plucked out his roll of whip-cord and tossed it down. "*Trouvaille!* My rustic, thou art a pearl!" In a minute Tony was tied tight at ankle and wrist. He made no effort to fight. He was cowed, dazed, and could not turn his eyes from Doricot. But Doricot was quick and cruel with the cord and laughed to himself. "Good-by to thee, my lad," he said and strutted across to Tabitha.

At his touch she flamed out. "Let me be, ye little vermin! Ah, how durst ye mishandle un so? You'm worse nor he as you do know well. Oh, and you to tread on un!"

"Madame," said Doricot gravely, "good madame, was it I bade the fellow murder your uncle?" She quailed before his pale, flickering eyes and he shook his head. "I do not like you, madame."

SHE too was tied up ankle and wrist, but he allowed her a chair. Dick pressed her down into it and drew back to the door. He was enjoying life. Doricot turned to Mr. Hartop, who, pausing often to look and grumble and mutter threats, had begun to struggle into his clothes. "Now, mine ancient, I am at leisure to expound."

"What's that, sir?" said Mr. Hartop. "If you would be so kind as to get to Chippenham and tell the constable Robin Higginbottom, which lives by the church, I would thank 'e for it."

"You are very generous, my friend. Without doubt, therefore, you yearn to reward me richly."

Mr. Hartop stared. "How you come to be always about me, that's more nor I know," said he. "But I be heartily glad you was here now, and if you would get to the constable, to Chippenham——"

"You are in a hurry to be rid of me, mine ancient. Almost it might seem that you mistrusted my company. I confess I should resent that. Or you mean not to pay me due recompense for salving of you. That thought distresses me."

Mr. Hartop looked a sulky fear. "I don't know how you come to be here," he muttered.

Then Tabitha spoke. "Old fool thou be! 'Twas the little vermin as set us on to thee!"

Mr. Hartop stared from one to the other. Doricot laughed. "A venomous piece, that girl of thine, my friend. If she can not stick thee, she would have thee quarrel with the man that saves thee."

"'Tis the little vermin hath the money that was stole from thee on the road!" Tabitha cried. "Is't not, Tony? Tony, lad, speak, speak!"

"Tony?" quote Doricot, as if he heard the name for the first time. He strutted across the room to the prostrate Tony and stirred him with his foot. "Now, Tony, my sweet lad, speak. Did I bid thee steal? Did I bid thee do murder on an old man?" His comical piping voice suddenly acquired ferocity. "Answer me, knave!"

But Tony answered nothing.

Hartop, who was by now half-dressed, made a dash for the door. He came upon the breadth of Dick's hard bosom. Doricot hauled him back by the slack of his shirt. "Fie, fie, you neglect the decencies, mine ancient. Consider—but for me, you would

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be now upon your face, a dagger between your shoulders, dead as bacon. Relish that. Saving my presence, you are now a corpse—a corpse with the fiend, as you may expect, feeling for you. How much would you pay me to bring you back to life? Reckon it generously, and I protest I'll ask no more." Mr. Hartop here spluttered something. "Hush, hush, you will always be talking. Now, look you, the jest is that I ask you nothing."

"Then what a plague be you saying?"

"We come to the marrow of the matter. Gift me no gifts. Stake something on my fortunes. I, Captain Nicholas Doricot—with a certain small fame, look you—I am about to sail on a venture to Tripolis, Egyptus and the Syrias. My ship is found and chartered. I need no more than a two hundred pound or three to equip me. For the which, as you have a mind to lend me, I accord you one twenty-fifth share in the venture and promise a profit not less than fifty per centum. Honor of Nick Doricot!" He tapped his breast.

"I—I—I——" Mr. Hartop stammered. "I lend thee a two hundred pound? I'll see thee hanged first!"

"Nay, nay," Doricot said sweetly, "that is not the way of it. But 'tis very like I may see thee stabbed. For since thou hast no thanks for thy salvation, I must needs restore thee to perdition. Therefore I'll e'en cut the cords of these sweet children and set them at thee again, entwine thee desperately with monsieur, hand the dagger to madame and bid good night to Master Hartop." He was smiling sweetly, but his hands clutched at the man and his eyes were strange.

"Are you mad?" Hartop squealed, twisting in his grip. "Sir, sir, this is no jest neither, I say. Why, 'tis foul and cruel so it is! Oh, you be a lunatic—you——"

"Bibble-babble," Doricot broke in. "What, that way will not please you neither? You prefer me to meddle? You demand it? Nay, sir, but we must have justice. So here's for it!" He hurled himself upon Mr. Hartop and the two went down on the floor together. When Doricot rose again out of a storm of plaints and oaths, Mr. Hartop was bound as firmly as the others. Captain Doricot looked the helpless creatures over and shook his head. "A sad scene!" he lamented. "Almost I despair of human dignity."

Mr. Hartop, who was purple and swollen, poured out a flood of threats and abuse

"Now cometh justice," quoth Doricot and enthroned himself on the end of the bed. "Master Hartop, you are proven mean in the heart. You must be taught to spend. Ho, rustic, feel in his pouch there!" Mr. Hartop vehemently protesting, Dick plucked out a bunch of keys. "Apply them to the strong-box there, good rustic." Mr. Hartop lamenting, the iron-bound box, his bank, was opened.

Doricot leaned over and drew out two of the leather bags which it held and solemnly counted himself two hundred pounds. "Two hundred, nor less nor more," said he. "I would have given thanks for it as a loan. It was denied and justice commands that it be made a fine." Mr. Hartop lifted up his voice anew. "Two hundred to me,"—Doricot pouched the gold—"five pounds to my minister, the good rustic." He slapped them into Dick's broad palm. "Justice is satisfied." Punctiliously he put the remainder back in the box. "Down with the lid, rustic. Lock and restore the keys to our ancient, that he may praise God he fell not among thieves. So thy work is done. *Vial* Away, I need thee no more." Dick looked at him oddly and grinned and shambled out.

Doricot skipped down from the bed. "Oh, Hartop, let thy soul take heed to this lesson, or the deadly sin of avarice shall condemn thee to perdition." He turned from the answering objurgations to Tabitha, who wriggled on her chair and screamed at him.

"Madame," he said gravely, "you are a woman who have forgot that you are a woman. You must be taught by suffering. Farewell. Tony Dassell, you are a man who would cheat his friend. Therefore you are no use to any man. We abandon you." He strutted out and laughed as he went.

So they three were left close bound to revile one another. But Tony Dassell lay silent and his face was wet with tears. . . . The candle sputtered and went out and darkness fell upon their plight. . . . And none were like to find them till the shepherds came to the farm on Saturday.

IF TABITHA and her uncle had not fallen to shrieking at each other, they might have heard Captain Doricot swear and swear again. For when he came to the road he found in place of his

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horse the horse that had fallen with Tony. Dick had made the exchange and Dick had vanished. To hunt him was plainly mad. Doricot's mirth was something chastened as he jogged back to Chippenham. But he laughed still. Besides the humors of the good folks in the farmhouse, he appreciated the humor of his own case. And he admired his rustic.

Prudence bade him get quickly away from the neighborhood of Mr. Hartop, but he had no mind to go without his supper. He made for the Bull. Though the rest of Chippenham town had been some while abed, the good hostess was waiting for him. He told her a fascinating fable of an accident to his friend at Calne which must make him ride away to Poole that very hour to warn the poor lad's wife he was a-dying. Having thus spread a neat fog over his intention to make for Bristol, he finished his supper and took a polite farewell with kisses.

And in the yard he found two horses and Dick. He laughed softly. "Now why, my lad, why, why, why?"

"I took the best horse for you to have the worse un. So as to make sure where you was a-going."

"And why?"

"For to go with you," quoth Dick with a grin.

"It is in my mind," said Doricot, "that if I do not kill you first, I may like you well."

Dick laughed. "Dearie me, and me that's thinking the same of you!"

"So be it." Doricot mounted. "And now, my rustic, I'll thank ye for the money that Tony stole."

Dick laughed again. "'Tis to go for my share in your ship."

"You believe that there is a ship?" Doricot grinned.

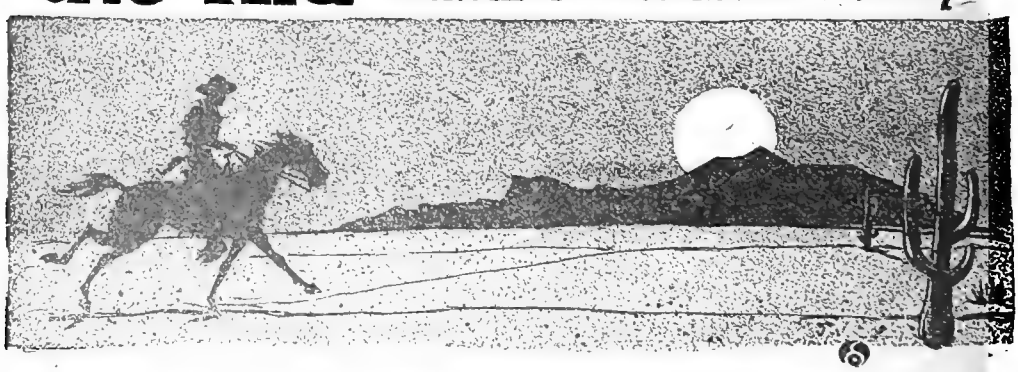
"Leastways for my share in the captain," Dick drawled.

They jogged off very friendly into the night.

AND that is the way money was found for the famous voyage of the ship *Toby* to the Levant seas and the parts of Syria, which is accounted one of the greater exploits of the great age of English seamen.

The Pursuit of Billy the Kid

Edward Alexander Phillips



SHERIFF LAFE TURNER was the most successful bad-man hunter in the Southwest, except one. So was Sheriff Dave Bosky. But, though the rivalry between the two was at all times excessively keen, it was entirely friendly, for each confessed not only to a lively appreciation of the other's prowess, but to a sincere regard for his personal, as well as professional, qualities.

The adjoining districts over which they exercised eternal vigilance against the depredations of frontier outlaws was divided by two hundred miles of the boundary-line between Arizona and New Mexico, and thus it happened that they were frequently thrown across each other's trail, so to speak, in the pursuit, capture and prosecu-

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tion of cattle rustlers and other criminals. Right strenuously did the rivals at such times vie with each other in tests of courage, endurance and acumen; and, urged to their utmost by their individual adherents, there came a time when each lived with no other thought than to "put one over" on the other.

So Turner and his deputies, on the Arizona side, were hard hit the day Bosky drove his buckboard into their county-seat with two manacled horse-thieves who had escaped from the Arizona jail a fortnight before and had been hunted high and low by Lafe and his posses.

"I just picked up these boarders o' yourn as I was drivin' along," explained Dave, as Turner glared in astonishment. "They was playin' mumblepeg by the roadside out at the edge o' town. Thought mebbe you'd like to see 'em, as you and your deputies have been skylarkin' up and down the country lookin' for 'em for a couple o' weeks. If you don't think you can hold 'em, I'll send my ten-year-old kid, Jimmie, over to take care of 'em for you till the trial comes on."

"Come and get a drink, you bow-legged old coyote," was Lafe's sole acknowledgment of his humiliation.

But the New Mexican sheriff's glee was short-lived. Before the end of the week he received the following note:

DAVE BOSKY, Sheriff,
——, New Mexico.

That gang of rustlers that's been a-raidin' the ranges of your bailiwick for the last year was fools enough to cross the line for a few minutes Friday night, thinkin', perhaps, I was asleep. Course I smeared my wing over 'em immejit. They's six in the lot, so you'd better bring over about eighty of your men to take 'em home.

LAFE TURNER.

It was "on" Bosky this time, but he got even a month later by arriving in the nick of time to rescue his friend, whose ammunition had given out in a running fight with a band of renegade Apaches. Then Turner turned the tables by uncovering a plot to assassinate the New Mexico sheriff, arresting the plotters and landing them behind the bars.

Honors were even when Lafe got *the* tip. Billy the Kid, the most dangerous Apache outlaw that ever terrorized the Southwest, the bloodiest as well as the most elusive cut-throat at large, had been driven across the Mexican border and had been seen within the last thirty-six hours in Arizona territory. Lafe figured out the situation. He knew the Kid had been hard-pressed for months by the Texas and Mexican officers, who were anxious to secure the big reward offered for the outlaw, dead or alive; and he knew that there was but one point in Arizona where the fugitive would dare seek a hiding-place.

Fully a third of the joint district over which Turner and Bosky held jurisdiction was a waterless, treeless waste, a naked alkali desert, destitute of any form of vegetation. Near the center of this great barren area, at least sixty miles from the desert's edge, the territorial boundary-line ran through a chain of volcanic hills which lifted their jagged heads from the level sea of sand stretching away beyond the limits of vision in every direction.

This strange, rugged formation was not more than a mile in length, by, perhaps, five hundred yards in width, and at its base a scrubby growth of greasewood managed to keep alive from the moisture that oozed from a sluggish spring near the center. By reason of its next to inaccessible position and the perfect facilities it afforded for observing the approaches from every quarter, the desolate place formed an ideal retreat for a fugitive, provided he carried a supply of food and plenty of ammunition to stand off would-be captors.

The trip of sixty miles across that glistening hell, through sand fetlock deep, was an undertaking that required a rattling good horse to negotiate; and a hunted man, once safe in the rocky refuge, might laugh at his enemies indefinitely. Turner knew all this. He felt certain the Kid would make straight for this natural barracks, and he was thoroughly alive to the difficulties attending the job of routing him out.

But that was not what particularly bothered Mr. Lafayette Turner. What worried him was whether "my friend, the enemy," or, in other words, Sheriff Dave Bosky, had heard of the Kid's presence in the country. To be assured on this point, he sent his cleverest deputy, on a carefully considered pretext, to visit the New Mexican officer and find out. Joy was Lafe's when he received a cipher dispatch from his man informing him that Bosky would leave for the East on the following day to attend the International Convention of Sheriffs and Peace Officers. He immediately ciphered

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back, instructing his deputy to "see that party buy his ticket and get on the train, then come home."

When the deputy got back he regaled his superior with a lively account of the circumstances of Bosky's departure.

"You'd 'a'died laffin'," he chuckled, "to see ole Dave all dressed up in tenderfoot togs. His wife even made him put on a biled shirt and standin' collar! Pore ole Dave roared till he was redder in the face than usual, but Mandy made him promise not to take off that shirt and collar till he got back home. Dave promised, but he told me, on the sneak, as we walked down to the depot, that he intended to shed 'em at Saint Louis. Oh, you can gamble I seen him buy his ticket, straight through to Philadelphy, where the Convention is to be at, and I was the last feller to shake hands with him as he stepped on the train."

"Didn't you mention the Kid at all?"

"Sure I mentioned him—onct. 'Dave, I says, 'what d'you suppose Billy the Kid's a-doin' all this time? Ain't heard nothin' of him for a month.'

"'Aw,' says he, yawnin', 'I suppose he's still playin' hide-an'-seek with them dopy rurales. He'll never leave that picnic ground. It's too easy for him, foolin' them Greasers. Besides, he's got a friend behind every rock in Mexico. Nope, the Kid's too wise to git out where he can be got at.'

"Then he busted a few more blood-vessels, damnin' that standin' collar. I hefted his grip, while he was buyin' his ticket, and say! it weighed a ton! Reckon he's takin' back a lot o' cuffs and shackles to show them Eastern sheriffs the kind o' irons we use out here."

"Guess so," said Lafe thoughtfully. Then, after a pause, "Danged if it looks quite right for me to take advantage o' Dave's absence! But I can't help it. There's no tellin' what the Kid'll do if he's left alone, so I've just simply got to go get him—that's all there is to it. You hold this shack down, and give it out that I've gone to Tombstone on business."

II

IT WAS midafternoon and blistering hot when Turner dismounted from his horse and prepared to make camp under a clump of scrawny willows at the desert's edge. "Now, Monk, I want you to rest up and get a good ready on," he adjured his stocky saddle animal "for, when it gets dark, we're goin' to hit that sand out there. Got to make the rocks before daylight. Cause why? The Kid may have a spy-glass, and it's just as well to get to the cover before he lamps us. It ain't no cinch that these Injun togs o' mine'll fool him, if he happens to see us before we're ready, so we've got to hustle, once we get started."

So saying, the sheriff made a pillow of his saddle and went to sleep.

Midnight found the man-hunter well on his way. More than half the distance had been covered and his horse was making a game and steady fight of it. By three in the morning, however, the brave little beast showed sudden signs of distress and Lafe alighted and led him for a couple of miles, talking earnestly to him in low tones, for sounds on the desert carry far.

With the first glow of approaching daylight the sheriff remounted and urged the failing animal with spur and whispered oaths. Before him rose the hills, their black outline becoming more and more distinct with the coming light. Half a dozen miles farther and he would reach the greasewood shelter. He begged, he swore, and the spent animal forged ahead, swaying, staggering.

Barely two miles more—a mile—a thousand yards—it was all over! The poor brute, utterly exhausted, lurched forward to its knees, emitted a groan of pain and toppled over. The excited rider swung himself free from the saddle and, without a minute's delay, dragged the quivering animal to a slight depression where, working like a madman, he covered it with sand. This important task completed, he ran for the greasewood thicket and, arriving, congratulated himself that, after all, his approach had, in all probability, not been observed.

Lafe knew the location of the spring, the only water in the hills, but, so careful was he to conceal his movements from possible observation that it was many hours before he was able to reach a point from which he could command an unobscured view of it. There he settled himself to wait. As he waited and watched, the sickening thought struck him all at once that it was easily possible that his strenuous trip had been in vain; that the man he sought might have

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hurried on through Arizona; that—here his distressing reflections were suddenly ended by a sight which thrilled him with delight.

Skulking in and out among the boulders which choked a narrow gulch leading down to the spring, he made out the figure of a man! And, if that man wasn't the identical slippery scoundrel who had been for the past three years hunted by the peace officers of two nations, two States and two Territories, Lafe Turner was then and there willing to admit that he had never seen a description of him.

Between the watcher and the spring, and within a dozen feet of the latter, there towered a huge rock and, as the bandit was evidently making his way to water, the sheriff instantly decided to creep down behind this barrier, so as to meet his man at close quarters. Waiting until he again observed the approaching figure, moving with great caution, lose himself in a turn of the gulch, Lafe glided across the open space to the rock and—waited.

He waited an insufferably long time. Why didn't the fellow come? Impatience, coupled with the fear that the prize might have scented danger and changed his plans, moved the sheriff to a cautious survey of the situation. From his hiding-place he peeked around the edge of the rock, an inch, two inches, a foot—tarantulas and rattlesnakes! The cold-blooded hyena was standing stock still on the opposite side!

Lafe drew a long breath, gripped his gun with a firmer hold and took a full stride around the boulder. He saw the buckskin coat of his quarry move away in the same circular direction. Knowing now that he had been discovered by the outlaw, he threw caution to the winds and started on a fast walk after the fugitive. As hunter and hunted circled the rock, the former caught an occasional glimpse of the latter's heels. Suddenly, quick as lightning, Lafe turned and lunged back in the opposite direction. It was a disastrous move, for, as he turned, his foot caught on a greasewood root and he fell sprawling, his gun flying from his hand and clattering down the gulch. He sprang to his feet, but he knew it was all up with him—that his enemy had the drop—that he was powerless—that——

"W-a-a-l, Dave Bosky, you miserable coyote!"

"Shake, Lafe. That disguise o' yourn sure had me fooled, till you took the tumble and I got a peek at your face. Come on, le's call it a stand-off."

"How'm I goin' to forgive that awful confidence talk you handed my deputy about the sheriffs' convention?" growled Lafe.

"'Twasn't no worse than the one you sent him to hand me about the Kid," Dave retaliated.

"Well, then, shake!"

At that moment a sand-covered mustang, answering the name of Monk, pushed his nose through the greasewood, looking for a drink. He got it, and so did Dave and Lafe when they sauntered into the town.

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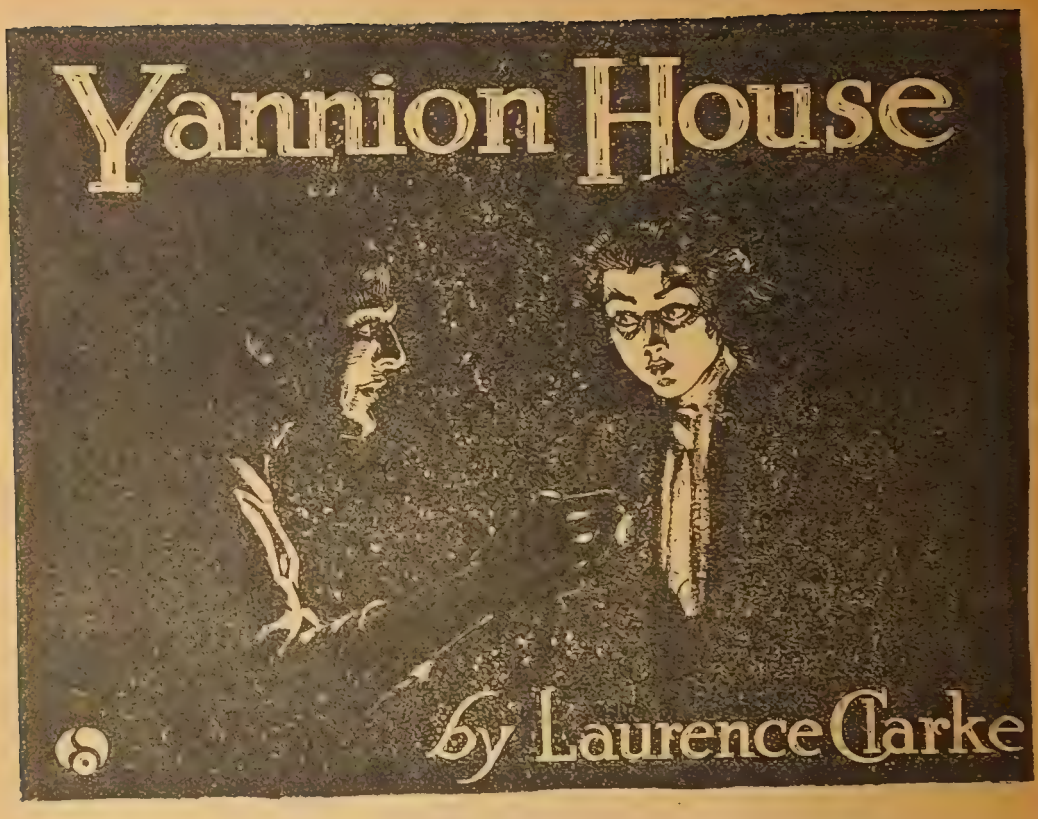
Yannion House



by Laurence Clarke

CHAPTER I

A SWIM AND A CHASE

LIEUTENANT BOYLE O'FARREL, R. N., swam hard; the breakers seized him, beat him, made a cork of him, and finally hurled him breathless and exhausted against a stanchion of Hartpool Pier.

Lieutenant O'Farrel was a deserter and had jumped overboard, unseen, from the submarine of which he had been in command. In taking so extreme a step, he deemed himself justified and acting more in accordance with the dictates of honor than against them. The details do not matter, except that he had meant to leave the impression that he was dead.

A little later he emerged from the shadow of the pier, his teeth chattering uncomfortably, and in bare feet ran swiftly across the wet sands to an indentation in the cliffs. Here, taking his bearings, he approached a boulder, behind which he dived and began searching for something. When he came into sight again there was a startled look on his face and he passed his fingers through his hair in perplexity.

"Well, I'm dashed," he said, "if that isn't the devil's own luck!"

He searched again; then came another long, helpless pause. He felt in his saturated pockets and pulled into view eleven shillings and fourpence.

"What's the good of eleven shillings fourpence to a dead man," he said with rueful jocosity, "who wants to eat and live and pay his passage to Canada?"

O'Farrel, on shore leave the day before, had carefully hidden behind that boulder a suit of clothes, four five-pound notes and a cloth cap. The ward-room of the *Icarus*, the mother-ship, floated before his vision as the pleasantest, snuggest, and most luxurious palace of an apartment he had ever seen. He shivered and regretted it mournfully; and, under cover of these regrets, the practical man in him, the man in wet clothes seated on a sodden chalk boulder, planned a felonious intrusion into a stranger's house.

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He did not know whose house, and he did not care, but it was clear to him that if he desired to achieve his object of remaining dead, he must obtain clothes. The loss of his money altered his plans. Canada was now out of the question, and the new course indicated was to make straight (after having obtained a coat and boots) to Harwich, there to submit himself to the rigors of a tramp's forecastle.

Rain was beating on O'Farrel's uncovered head when he at last found himself on the top of the cliff, looking hopelessly along a desolate rain-swept road. He had dallied with the idea of a felony until the notion of it became commonplace and ceased to trouble his conscience. But when at last he reached a small cottage, all shuttered and dark, he shirked it. Two miles farther on, however, he found himself approaching a village, and realized that the time had come to act.

Thus he, Lieutenant Boyle O'Farrel, two hours since in active command of Submarine *X15*, broke into a farm-house, entered through the window, and cursed a flapping blind under his breath as he did so.

But O'Farrel possessed scant aptitude for burglary, for no sooner had he stepped into the dark farm kitchen than a loud unfriendly voice cried: "Hi!" A man roared out "Who's that?" and made a dash at him, for he felt something drive past his shoulder.

The window was faintly outlined. O'Farrel decided to go away, and he carried out his decision with a celerity that surprised himself. But as he whipped aside the blinds and hurled himself into the garden he heard the inner door of the kitchen open and a yokel's voice bellowing up the stairs.

"Hi, Guvnor! Wake up! Hi! Hi!"

As O'Farrel reached the road and, running swiftly, turned to the left under the avenue of trees, he heard the voices of two men who were now in the lane outside the farm.

"Which way did he go?" asked a strange voice.

"Under the avenue," came the answer, in the voice of the man who had first discovered him.

He had not gone a hundred yards when he looked back and saw the two men pounding under the trees after him; one of them carried something in his hand, and, as he ran, cried out,

"You'd better stop!"

But O'Farrel had never felt so like running in all his life.

The activity and pertinacity of his pursuers surprised and offended him, and as he dashed out from the avenue of elms and found himself in a village street, with lights twinkling in occasional windows and with a dark forbidding mansion standing back from the road on the right, he heard a thunderous uproar. Farmer Ryse was banging on the village policeman's door with the butt of his gun.

O'Farrel, having cleared the village at top speed, found himself approaching an open common. Built on the edge of the common itself was a square-towered village church. He could make out a blur of white gravestones. He paused and listened for a minute, then hearing no sound—Farmer Ryse's knocking having ceased—climbed the churchyard wall and squatted down breathless under its shelter.

He had scarcely been there five minutes, when he heard the voice of the farm laborer who had discovered him.

"He's in there, Bernard," he was saying to the village constable.

They were quite near him on the far side of the wall.

"Aye, he's in there, right enough," came a second voice; "I saw him leap the wall like a hare."

O'Farrel glanced about him, wondering what next to do. Near him, under black cypress-trees, was a heavy looking stone building, the burial-place of the Yannion's, whose family mansion O'Farrel had passed, and from where he crouched he could see the vague outline of the house itself.

There was a little wood beyond Yannion House and O'Farrel, knowing that a search was about to be made for him in the graveyard, decided to double back and seek shelter there. He rose and, bending low, ran among the gravestones toward the farther wall. Peering over, he saw that he had to cross a road and an open patch of grass before he could attain the high fence that surrounded the grounds of the mansion.

He was climbing the churchyard wall when his three pursuers, headed by Farmer Ryse and his gun, entered the graveyard. O'Farrel bent double and ran across the road.

He was beneath the high fence at last. He leaped twice, and the second time managed with an effort to reach the top. He

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had swung one leg over, when the dark figure of a crouching man ran toward him and stood stock still, peering up into his face!

Amazement stupefied O'Farrel for a moment, but the man made no effort to take advantage of the depending leg that was almost within his grasp. He whispered something, that O'Farrel, intent on escape, did not hear, then turned and hurried away under the shadow of the wall. He went softly with a perfect knowledge of the ground and was still crouching as he ran.

O'Farrel, crossing the spongy lawn at the back of the mansion, suddenly changed his mind; the house was so obviously empty, and the trees before him provided less cover than he had at first thought Therefore, for the second time that night, he entered a strange house. This time also he made his felonious ingress by a kitchen window.

He was exhausted and depressed. He remembered groping his way along a seemingly endless corridor, through a series of dark rooms, and finally in a small back room on the second floor he remembered a bed, quite a comfortable bed. He sat on this bed, resting his head in his hands just to pull himself together, as it were.

CHAPTER II

BY THE LIGHT OF A MATCH

THE next thing he realized was that it was morning, and that daylight was streaming in round the outside edges of the window-blind. He sprang up in alarm, wondering where he was, and discovered that he had spent a night on a white-counterpaned bed in an expensively furnished small room.

In the light that percolated round the edges of the blind he took in instantly the features of the room. Over the fireplace there hung a photograph of a man in running shorts, posing self-consciously beside half a dozen silver trophies of his prowess. Near the bed on which he had been sleeping was a man's wardrobe.

O'Farrel, as he stood there, oppressed by the gloom and silence of the house, recalled the breathless incidents of last night, and finally the peculiar behavior of the man who had crept up to him and spoken as he mounted the wall.

Then, having pulled himself together and realized clearly his situation, he began a tour of the house. The rooms he had passed through last night he reinspected in the present half-light of day. He found them all depressing, stuffy and holland-wrappered, and he was glad at last to return to the small chamber where he had spent the night.

It was now that he decided to avail himself of one of the suits of clothes from the wardrobe, and he managed to squeeze himself into a blue serge coat, much too narrow in the shoulders, and helped himself to a pair of smart boots, not at all the kind he would have purchased for his own use. However, being fully arrayed and ready for his journey, he searched about for a sheet of paper, which he found in a small study opening off the bedroom. Here he left a note admitting his felony and promising to make repayment at the first opportunity. Having salved his conscience to this extent, he folded the note and prepared to leave the house.

First of all, he took his bearings by a cautious survey of the garden from behind the bedroom blind. He found that the room he occupied was at the back of the house, overlooking the clump of trees in which he had thought of taking shelter. From where he stood he caught a view of half the kitchen garden, and of an old disused well covered with planks. His eyes had traveled as far as this when he started back, slipping the blind hurriedly into place.

Standing near the garden well were three men. One of them was a burly fellow in a brown corduroy gamekeeper's suit. Another a man in a black morning coat and a silk hat; the third was a constable in uniform, no doubt the persevering Bernard of last night. What they were saying O'Farrel had no means of knowing, but he concluded they had traced his footsteps as far as that.

He was right in his conjecture, for at that moment the village constable had just told for the third time, for the benefit of Detective-Sergeant Miles, the man in the black morning coat, the epic of last night's chase.

"I know all that," said Detective Miles shortly; "you have told it before. What I want to know is where he went after he left the lawn. His footprints are clear enough there."

"In my opinion," said the man in the brown gamekeeper's suit, "he made for the wood."

"Then he must have flown over this

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wall," said the detective, glancing at the high brick wall that surrounded the garden, "for he didn't climb it. It is these infernal gravel paths that spoil us. He could escape half a dozen ways if he got on to them."

O'Farrel peeped out furtively again a few minutes later; the detective and the others had disappeared. But he realized now that it would be impossible for him to risk leaving the house until dark, so he settled down to spend the day there.

In the study next to the bedroom he discovered a tin of biscuits and made an insufficient meal. Harwich was a good twenty miles away and in the afternoon he decided to rest until it was safe for him to go. He laid himself on the white counterpane in the small bedroom and slept heavily.

When he awoke it was dark. Not a glimmer of light of any kind penetrated the little room. For a long time he sat at the bedside listening. He could almost hear his own heart beating. Then, to break the silence that jarred his nerves, he yawned audibly. Instantly a swift sound, as of a startled mouse, struck his ears. There was a rustle as of silk or paper. Footsteps seemed to be pattering swiftly away, into the silence

For an instant O'Farrel was dazed, then he crossed the bedroom and went into the little study beyond. Here the darkness was equally oppressive. He paused and listened. Silence had again fallen on the house like doom, but there was a faint pungent odor in the air—an odor of burnt paper! O'Farrel was a man, calm almost to stolidity, but he felt his heart-beats quicken as he realized that he was not the only occupant of Yannion House.

He felt his way to the desk in the middle of the small room. Here he came upon a box of matches, and, after a pause, he struck a light. As the match flared he saw that the window-curtains had been drawn completely over the window and pinned with a black glass-headed pin. The smell that had assailed his nostrils issued from a tiny heap of charred papers lying in the hearth. On one of the charred fragments he made out the initials A. F. M.

A MINUTE later on the desk he discovered a scattered heap of letters which gave him a clue to the identity of A. F. M. He was standing, glancing at these letters by the light of a match, when he again heard that faint rustling as of silk or paper. In a flash he extinguished the light and listened in the intense darkness. The sound grew in volume. He was standing at the side of the desk, and he waited motionless, listening.

In the meantime the rustling had ceased, and the invisible door from the corridor was being slowly opened. He could hear it move softly on its hinges. O'Farrel's keen eyes failed to fathom even a yard of that heavy darkness, and he held his breath as the renewed rustling came cautiously and steadily toward him.

He had formed no plan of action, and he was not a believer in ghosts, but he flinched a little as the rustling again suddenly ceased. He could hear some one breathing now, breathing within a foot of him!

Suddenly the breathing ceased and a long silence ensued. O'Farrel felt himself almost overcome with a desire to leap bodily forward and grapple with the unknown. He wondered apprehensively what was happening; why the other person did not move or breathe. For a full minute he remained thus.

Then he heard the breathing again and a sound like the hopping of a sparrow on a boarded floor. A hand was tapping on the desk at his side. Then O'Farrel understood. The matches were on the desk. In a second his hand closed upon them. The next moment he struck a light and simultaneously with the flare of the match, a loud scream of terror resounded through the room.

Why O'Farrel struck that match he did not know, especially as a few minutes before he had told himself that darkness was his best friend. Thinking of it afterward, he could only conclude that curiosity overcame fear and caution.

The scream was followed by a scuttle of footsteps and in the dim light O'Farrel saw a girl cowering against the curtains, watching him with wide eyes of terror. She was a beautiful girl. Even the fear that contorted her features could not conceal that fact. She wore a filmy evening dress, pale blue in color and silk lined, and was without a hat, but depending from her neck hung a long cloak with hood thrown back.

"Good God!" ejaculated O'Farrel, gasping at the sight. "Do you know I nearly went for you in the darkness?"

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As he spoke, the match in his fingers burned out and he heard a swift rustling and rapid footsteps. She was trying to pass him to get to the door.

"No, no!" cried O'Farrel, springing to intercept her. He struck another match and, as the girl crouched away from him, lit the candle.

"I am not going to hurt you," he said soothingly.

The girl was before the fireplace now, watching him. A long pause followed. She seemed to be going over things in her mind, to be thinking rapidly, and the expression in her beautiful eyes, still fixed on O'Farrel, changed slowly. Terror gave place to something else.

"Don't be afraid of me," said O'Farrel.

The girl took a deep breath.

"I am not afraid," she said at last, "but it is all a mistake. A horrible, *horrible* mistake!"

CHAPTER III

BURNED LETTERS

WHAT O'Farrel expected to see when he struck the match, he could not have defined, but, if an ogre had confronted him, his surprise could have been scarcely greater than it was now, as he stood regarding this frail, delicate girl, with clasped hands and wide anxious eyes—eyes that sought the door unceasingly.

"What do you mean?" continued O'Farrel in his quiet voice. "This horrible mistake you speak of. What is it?"

In the pause that followed, the girl's eyes grew a little hard and cold; the last trace of fear left them. O'Farrel was conscious of an antagonism to himself personally and felt more than ever at sea.

The girl spoke very slowly, as if her words were an indictment.

"You are here searching and prying, just as the other man is always searching and prying in the village. Always questioning the servants and watching and waiting. It is intolerable and it is wrong and unjust and criminal!"

Her voice rose as she spoke and the look of chilling dislike in her eyes intensified.

O'Farrel tried to interject a question, but the girl continued unheeding.

"He is the best and finest man that ever lived and such a crime would horrify him." She paused for breath. "You might just as well suspect me!"

O'Farrel admired the flash of her glance in the uncertain candle-light, the defiance and courage of her bearing.

"I don't know what you imagine I suspect," he said; "I don't even know whom you mistake me for."

The candor of his tone had not carried conviction, even to her preoccupied mind.

"If I am a criminal," went on O'Farrel, "perhaps it would be reasonable to ask what my crime may be."

"Personally," said the girl, drawing herself up and speaking with icy formality, as if to close the discussion, "I don't think anything has happened to Mr. Yannion at all. I think he is abroad."

What the disappearance of Mr. Yannion, whoever he might be, had to do with him, O'Farrel was at a loss to know. He put a blunt question:

"Who am I?"

The girl began to glide past him with great dignity toward the door.

"I don't know what you call yourself," she said loftily, "detective or private inquiry agent, but whatever it is, it is a mean and contemptible occupation!"

"Look here," said O'Farrel, "it is time we straightened things out. You are mistaking me for some one else. I am not a detective."

Then, without betraying his identity in the least, he gave her an outline of the circumstances that had driven him to seek shelter in that house. He spoke frankly and easily, and for the first time the girl began to see him as he was—a quite presentable, well-bred man, with traces of gallantry in his manner, and an instinctive air of protection toward her that was not in the least offensive or obtrusive.

Then, having almost won her confidence, the consuming curiosity that possessed O'Farrel soon enabled him to learn her story, or certain elements of it.

"Who is this Yannion person?" he questioned presently.

They were standing apart in the candle-lit room, but the girl was not now eying the door or seeking to escape.

"He is the master of this house," she answered simply.

"The deuce he is!" said O'Farrel. He was irked by the uncomfortable tightness of the coat and waistcoat he had acquired. "Then

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he is a hock-bottled-shouldered, badly developed——"

"Really," cried the girl in shocked protest, "I——"

"I beg your pardon," apologized O'Farrel, "I meant nothing offensive."

"Mr. Yannion is my fiancé!"

THERE was a silence, during which O'Farrel shook a metaphorical fist at himself.

"I am only an Irishman," he said deftly. "I can not help saying the wrong thing. I suppose it is in my blood."

"How did you know he was narrow shouldered?" asked the girl with quick curiosity.

"Indeed it is not he at all," said O'Farrel. "I was thinking of somebody else."

"Of course you could not know he was my fiancé," commented the girl after a silence. O'Farrel thought that she forgave him rather easily.

O'Farrel's curiosity was still unappeased. Those burned letters were not yet explained.

"Would I be indiscreet again," he said, "if I ask why you burned those Major Masefield letters?"

He pointed to the hearth and the girl moved there deliberately and ground the charred fragments into powder with the toe of her shoe. When she looked at him again the frightened look had come into her eyes.

"How do you know they were written by Major Masefield?" she asked.

"I compared the initials not quite destroyed with the initials on another letter I found on the desk. You can trust me," he added, seeing that she still remained silent.

"Yes," breathed the girl at last, "I think I can."

"Major Masefield is my father," she said at last in a voice that was almost a whisper.

"Why did you destroy his letters?" asked O'Farrel in a low voice.

"Because they suspect him of murder!"

"And it is not true?"

"My father is the kindest man in the world," went on the girl, "but he is quick-tempered and indiscreet. He disliked Mr. Yannion and he wrote some hasty letters. After Mr. Yannion disappeared, they began to suspect him, and a London detective appeared in the village. Nothing has been said, but I know they suspect my father and I know he knows it, too. That is why I came here to-night, because I could not bear to see the shame and horror of it in his face, and I thought they might take these letters and use them in some horrible lying way to do him harm!"

"There are still several other letters," said O'Farrel, and he took them from the desk. "Perhaps we had better burn these as well."

He took the girl's silence as acquiescence, and when the remaining letters had been reduced to ashes, he smiled at her and did as she had done, grinding the charred paper into powder with the toe of his boot. After that, confidence being established between them, he took the candle and preceded her down the dark corridor.

"Oh, it is quite safe," he said in answer to her protest against carrying the lighted candle past the windows. "This is the back of the house. No one will see us."

When they came at last into the open, the keen night air entered O'Farrel's nostrils as something delicious, exhilarating and hope-inspiring. He felt as he always felt when he smelt the fresh air again after a long submersion in *X15*.

By a tacit understanding, Jessica Masefield allowed him to escort her toward her home. The night was dark and there were no stars. They passed unobserved through the village, past the blacksmith's shop, the stagnant pond that lay opposite it, and finally the bright lights of a red-blinded inn.

As they proceeded into the country the lane grew narrower and the hedges higher than before. They passed a dark spinney on the left, and farther on a row of stunted ash-trees. The girl walked very close to O'Farrel. He realized now the great effort it must have been for her to screw up her courage to enter that dark and gloomy house for the purpose of destroying her father's letters. Presently O'Farrel bent down toward her, his voice dropped almost to a whisper.

"You won't be afraid if I tell you something?" he asked.

"What is it?" breathed the girl anxiously.

"Some one has been following us for the last ten minutes."

Jessica Masefield stifled a cry that rose to her lips.

"Don't be afraid," whispered O'Farrel; "there is only a single person, probably quite easy to deal with. If you are really

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afraid it would be a good thing for you to run forward and I will step into the hedge and wait for him."

"Please, please, don't leave me!" said the girl, laying a swift hand on his arm.

"It is most likely a laborer on his way home," he said, but the girl was not reassured.

"Do you hear it now?" continued the girl, still in a half whisper.

"Yes," answered O'Farrel.

There was a distinct, cautious patter of footsteps in the gloom behind, but no figure was visible when he turned to look. They halted for a second and simultaneously the pursuing footsteps fell silent and after that they heard nothing more. The lane broke off to the right and a minute or two later the girl gave a sudden sigh of relief. A hundred yards in front of them, faintly distinguishable, appeared the outlines of a modern gabled house, bright with lights in the lower windows.

"My father is still up," said the girl as they approached.

O'Farrel noticed how inviting, spacious, and opulent the house looked. A short carriage-drive ran down to the roadside and he opened the barred gate to admit his companion. O'Farrel could think of no excuse for prolonging the interview, could devise no plan for securing another meeting. Despite his own personal predicament, the necessity for his journey to Harwich had faded, for the time being, entirely from his mind. A white hand came to him over the topmost bar of the gate.

"Good-by and thank you—thank you very much," said the girl.

"Thank you for trusting me," returned O'Farrel, retaining the hand for an imperceptible moment longer than the circumstance warranted.

"It is strange that I trusted you. I am a most suspicious person as a rule," she added.

"You showed a good deal of faith in human nature," he said, "considering the circumstances in which we met."

"Good-by," repeated the girl, and moved away.

"Good-by," called O'Farrel, his eyes fixed on her receding form.

He lingered near the gate till the door opened and for a moment the form of Jessica Masefield was silhouetted in the hall light. O'Farrel was not sure, but he thought she glanced back as she disappeared from view.

CHAPTER IV

THE BODY IN THE WELL

O'FARREL had been so fully occupied during the last half-hour that he had had no leisure to think of himself or his own concerns. An odd sense of desolation seized him for the first time. He realized now what he had done when he turned up, as it were, and cast from him his identity, his position in life, and all the advantages that might have secured him respect and comfort.

He was retracing his steps mechanically toward the village and, owing to the darkness, he found some difficulty in keeping to the road. He began to toy with the idea of seeing Jessica again.

"I think if I ever get a start in life," he said to himself, "and another name, I shall be justified in dropping her a note to ask how things turned out."

He felt that he would like to know that—to know more about the Major and the suspicions that had fallen on him in regard to the disappearance of his daughter's fiancé. Also he wondered at Jessica's strange conduct in regard to this fiancé; her apparent lack of interest in him was another puzzle he would like to solve. In parting from the girl he had experienced the sensation of being snatched away in the middle of a half-finished adventure.

These meditations carried him on his return journey as far as the dark spinney. Then he heard the sudden snapping of twigs behind him. He halted, instinctively stepping away from the hedge, and the next instant he became conscious of a quick rush of footsteps.

"Take that for your prying and peering!" a deep and vindictive voice growled in his ears.

There was no time to turn. Like a flash O'Farrel flung up his arm and a blow intended for his head descended upon it with such force as to fell him to the ground. His assailant had struck from behind with incredible swiftness and ferocity. O'Farrel's forearm was grazed to the bone. Even as he fell, the enormous power of the blow amazed him.

For a minute he laid prone and a wave of darkness swept over his mind. He lifted himself to his feet at last with a violent singing in his ears and his whole

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being shaken. In the distance he heard the receding footsteps, the crackling of twigs and then silence.

For some minutes he stood there, dazed and confused, nursing his injured arm, then, as his brain cleared, a gust of rage took him and the pain made itself manifest.

"By Gad! If I could lay hands on the man who did this," he said to himself.

The gratuitous and cowardly nature of the assault seemed to seize and drag out the primitive man in him.

He decided to make for the comfort of the red-blinded inn, and he had an ill-founded instinct that if he met his assailant he would know him again.

He walked warily now, keeping carefully to the middle of the road, and at last, as he neared the village, he saw on his right, beyond a little wood, three or four lanterns moving and twinkling in the distance.

The circumstance did not strike him as exceptional for, at that moment, he made out the cheerful scarlet windows of the inn.

There was now a vague half-consciousness in his mind that this sinister village was holding and drawing him, and that circumstances were conspiring to involve him in its destinies.

His feet rang on the tiled porch and the latch clicked gaily; then he surveyed the cozy room into which he had stepped, the sporting prints on the walls, and the sporting landlord, plump and contented, behind the bar. Leaning on the bar counter, talking to the landlord in a low voice, was Joseph Gospel, in a brown gamekeeper's suit. O'Farrel had seen him from the window of Yannion House that morning.

At O'Farrel's entrance both men turned sharply and glanced at him.

Joseph Gospel took up his tankard and drank, eying O'Farrel over its brim. He was a hard-featured man of generous build, a gray fringe of beard like a chin strap circled the nether part of his face.

"Evening, sir," said the genial landlord.

"Good evening," replied O'Farrel, who was glancing over the landlord's shoulder into a little parlor beyond, where a pleasant matron sat darning a stocking.

"I wonder if the good lady would do me a favor. I have had a nasty fall."

Ten minutes after, his injured arm had been bathed and bandaged and he was sitting over a meal of bread, cold meat and cheese.

"That must have been a terrible fall," said the landlady as she went into the parlor again.

Gospel had resumed the conversation that had ceased on O'Farrel's appearance.

THE outer latch clicked and the village blacksmith came in for his evening drink. He was a short man with abnormally long arms, and one side of his face was seared with a terrible scar, the effect of a fire in his house many years before. He nodded to Gospel and the landlord and stood by the bar a little apart from them, drinking his ale slowly, making, meanwhile, a curious motion of the lips with each gulp.

O'Farrel, who had seated himself at the other side of the room, caught some words that Joseph Gospel was speaking.

"That Miles is a sharp 'un."

"Yes, I warrant you," said the landlord.

The blacksmith who had his mug raised made a curious motion of his lips.

"'E is that," he said.

"He has not gone home to-night," said the landlord; "that's his bicycle there in the passage."

"I see him passing the lodge," said Gospel, who was the lodge-keeper and an old servant of Yannion House.

"He's got hold of something," said the landlord sententiously. "He isn't holding on like this for nothing."

"How do you reckon they'd pay a chap like that?" questioned the blacksmith. "By the piece, I reckon."

"So much a week's a more likely answer," answered Gospel, whose brother was village policeman.

They were speaking in subdued voices and the landlord said something that O'Farrel did not catch. The blacksmith laid his mug down quickly, there followed a silence, and the three men listened intently.

"There's some one running down the lane!" said the landlord in a startled voice, and as he spoke, heavy running footfalls passed the red blind and pulled up with a clatter in the dark doorway. The latched door was flung wide and an excited rustic appeared in the aperture. He was breathless and without a hat.

"They've—" he shouted and gulped for breath. "They've—found the body!"

"My God!" said Gospel and, rushing at him, seized him by the coat. "What's that,

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Stringer? What's that you say? Say it again!"

Stringer, a big-eyed, weedy man, with a stupid face, did nothing for a minute but gasp, "Ah—— Ah——" in confirmation of his news.

"They borrowed my bicycle lamp," he said becoming articulate again. "That Detective Miles did. 'Lend me your lamp, Mr. Stringer,' he says like——"

"Whose body, you fool?" shouted Gospel, shaking him.

"The Squire's!"

"Where?" It was the blacksmith who spoke up at him.

"Where?" repeated Joseph Gospel.

"In the well, dead. I must be off. Bernard Gospel's down there with a muffler over his face and they've borrowed my bicycle lamp."

He wrenched himself from Joseph Gospel's grasp and ran up the dark road, followed by the occupants of the bar—the landlord, the blacksmith, O'Farrel and the buxom landlady. They all went, leaving the door wide open, and following the panting Stringer along the lane toward Yannion House.

When Stringer broke off and went through a gate to the right they followed like a flock of sheep. Here O'Farrel saw the bobbing lanterns again. The wicket gate was opened by Gospel and they found themselves in the kitchen garden. The well had been uncovered and on the wall were a stable lantern, Stringer's bicycle lamp, and a policeman's helmet.

Bending over the well, his face pallid in the feeble light, was Detective Miles. From the well protruded the neck of a ladder. At the sound of the opening of the wicket gate the detective turned round with an angry stare.

"What do you want?" he called into the darkness. "Get out of that!"

The excited Stringer retreated a few steps, but Joseph Gospel moved forward.

"Is it true what Stringer says?" he asked.

"I don't know what he says," growled the detective.

"That you have found his body?"

"We have found a body. We don't know whose it is yet," returned Miles slowly. "We can't have all these people here. Get them away!"

A voice came up from the depths of the well.

The protruding ladder vibrated and in a minute the head of a man, his face muffled to the eyes, appeared. He pulled down the gray woolen comforter that obscured his face.

"You will have to give me a hand," he said to Miles.

"Is it the Squire, Bernard?" asked Joseph Gospel in a low voice.

"I don't know yet," answered Bernard and began to descend. Miles followed him and Joseph steadied the ladder.

Stringer, O'Farrel, and the landlord and his wife wore spectral faces in the faint light given by the two lanterns.

"You knowed him since he was a boy, didn't you, Joseph?" said the idiotic Stringer with a propitiatory smile.

Gospel heard him but made no reply.

The ladder began to quiver violently.

THEY laid the body, a ghastly dripping thing, on the footpath and Joseph Gospel took Stringer's bicycle lamp and looked close. The others stood in a semi-circle. There was a long silence.

Gospel touched garments, looked into the terrible face, and then rose heavily to his feet. He handed the lamp to his brother Bernard.

"It is him. God rest his soul!" he said at last.

"Do you recognize him?" asked Detective Miles, stepping forward.

"It is Mr. Yannion," said Joseph in a husky voice.

"I thought so," summed up Miles. "Everything pointed to that."

Bernard Gospel had the lantern now and was examining the body.

"It is a case of murder," he said to Miles in his official voice.

The detective nodded. "There will be an inquest," he added. "We must get the body away from here."

Joseph Gospel, who had left the group, came forward now and covered the body with his corduroy coat. Then he rose and looked Miles coldly in the face.

"This is a case for me," he said. "He was my master. I will mind him now."

The detective was about to make a gesture, dismissing his interference, but Gospel went on in a heavy, threatening voice.

"He goes from here in a coffin as befits him!"

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Miles protested and Bernard Gospel, who had resumed his helmet, also tried to reason with his brother, but Joseph had taken the situation into his own hands and he stood over his dead master with the jealous watchfulness of an old and faithful mastiff.

There was a short conference and, as a result, Stringer was dispatched to Wallbridge for an undertaker.

An hour later a reverent procession was formed and the coffin entered the inn on the shoulders of Joseph Gospel and his brother Bernard. Detective Miles lent a hand along the narrow passages and up the crooked stairs.

O'Farrel stood in the bar parlor while this went on. He had seen that terrible thing lifted and placed in the coffin and there was no doubt that Yannion had been murdered. His skull had been fractured by a heavy blow from behind. O'Farrel began to wonder whether there could be a connection between that blow and the one that had felled him to the ground an hour or two before.

The coffin, mounting the stairs, bumped in the angles of the wall. The men, breathing stertorously, seemed to take an endless time to reach the first floor, and O'Farrel gave a sigh of relief when at length he heard heavy, hob-nailed boots scraping on the bare boards above.

There was a pause; then came the creaking of a table upon which something heavy had been laid, and the men descended thunderously, glad to be rid of their task.

The landlord, who had listened with O'Farrel in the bar, now drew four tankards of ale, which he placed in a row on the counter.

Bernard Gospel, carrying his helmet in his hand, entered, followed by Miles, Stringer and Joseph. They drank silently. All thoughts were centered on that dread thing which burdened the table in the room above them.

Stringer made an exception to the others; he was flushed with the triumphs of the night. His bicycle lamp and himself were objects of importance. These strange circumstances had lifted him out of his dull obscurity. He felt that he and Miles were the heroes of the occasion, and he raised his tankard to the detective.

"Good 'ealth!" he said in a low voice.

Miles nodded coldly, but disdained to answer. For some minutes his eyes had been fixed on O'Farrel, who was seated near the window. He came over now, carrying his tankard and sat down before him.

"This is bad business," commented O'Farrel.

Miles nodded. He was a pasty-complexioned man with an ill-kept mustache, and he looked at O'Farrel with eyes that were unpleasantly odd in color.

"I have been at it these weeks past," he said, and took a draft from his tankard. "My motto is 'never say die.' Are you stopping here?" he asked, after another pause.

"Only for the night," replied O'Farrel. "I have just engaged a room here."

"So have I," said the detective. "I generally cycle into Wallbridge. But it is late, and I must see about the inquest first thing in the morning."

"It seems a motiveless sort of murder, doesn't it?" asked O'Farrel.

Miles, who had been pulling his long mustache and looking into his tankard, seemed not to hear.

"I did not catch your name," he said, lifting his strange eyes.

"My name was not mentioned," replied O'Farrel.

"You don't mind my asking?" said Miles.

O'Farrel, who was cautious, appeared to be frank.

"Oh, not at all," he said. "My name is Boyle."

CHAPTER V

THE THEFT

THAT night O'Farrel slept uneasily in a little whitewashed room, the walls of which were divided into triangles and squares by no less than fifteen hewn oak beams. O'Farrel counted them by candle light as he sat on the edge of the narrow bed.

His room was one of a row of three at the back of the inn, and in the next chamber lay the murdered body of Bernard Yannion. The room beyond this was occupied by Detective Miles.

O'Farrel's injured arm pained him a good deal, despite the excellent bandage provided him by the landlady. When he had extinguished the candle he tried hard to sleep, but it was beyond his power to cease thinking of the events of that day. Hours passed during which he pieced and unpieced those puzzling happenings.

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He believed there must be some sinister motive at the back of this strange and unaccountable murder. He wondered what train of reasoning had lead Miles to search in the well for the body, and he wondered unceasingly what effect the news would have on Jessica Masefield, for, after all, whether she cared for him or not, Yannion had been her fiancé.

It must have been three o'clock in the morning when O'Farrel, starting from a restless semi-consciousness, heard a thin, scraping noise. It appeared to be outside his window. He accounted drowsily for its apparent loudness by the fact that his nerves were jarred.

The next thing he was conscious of after this was a clatter of pails and the swish of brushes as the bricked yard below his window was subjected to its usual scrubbing. It was seven o'clock and already light. At his door a maid had put down his can of hot water and the boots he had left outside to be cleaned. He dressed quickly and, descending to the parlor, found a plentiful breakfast spread for two.

Detective Miles, the only other visitor at the inn, was not there; there were signs that he had broken off his meal hurriedly. A cup of tea growing cold, a piece of congealed looking bacon, and a slice of toast, with a semicircle bitten out of it, marked his place at the table.

It was not until O'Farrel had nearly finished his meal that it occurred to him to wonder at the silence of the inn, for the usual bustle and movement were entirely absent, and the place appeared not only silent, but deserted as well. He rose a little curiously and went into the bar. It was empty; the flap of the counter stood open. He returned then and, passing Detective Miles' bicycle in the passage, made his way into the yard behind the inn.

Here he found Joseph Gospel, Detective Miles and the landlord. They were standing back, staring up at a window. Joseph Gospel's expression was tragic and bewildered. The landlord wiped his forehead unceasingly with a red cotton handkerchief; he gave one the impression of a man who has just staggered to his feet after receiving a heavy blow. Miles was undisturbed, calculating, and observant as usual.

Neither the landlord nor Gospel took the least notice of O'Farrel as he moved toward them. Miles nodded curtly, then, going to the whitewashed wall, scrutinized two parallel lines which descended from the sill of the first-story window. These lines were a foot apart, and had been created by a heavy object grinding off the surface of the whitewash. Miles came to O'Farrel now.

"Did you hear any sound in the night?" he asked.

"Yes, I heard a scraping sound outside my window."

"Ah!" said Miles, glancing at the others. "Can you remember what time?"

"Between three and four in the morning," answered O'Farrel, "as nearly as I can guess. Why?"

"I wouldn't have had it happen for £100, not for £1,000," broke in the landlord despondently.

Joseph Gospel's lips tightened. Then he spoke slowly and deliberately through his teeth:

"If I get my hands on them that did it," he said, "God 'elp 'em! That's all I've got to say."

He turned and walked away with head bent and hands clasped behind him.

The detective had been looking closely into O'Farrel's face.

"This is all Greek to me," said O'Farrel, staring from one to the other.

Detective Miles pointed to the parallel lines.

"Do you see that?" he said. "Those lines were made by Mr. Yannion's coffin being taken from that window some time last night."

O'Farrel stared bewildered. His eyes fell on the landlord's tragic face. Then Miles spoke again:

"Mr. Yannion's body has disappeared!"

"Disappeared?" gasped O'Farrel.

IN A flash he understood the meaning of that scraping noise he had heard in the night. There was a long silence, then he turned to Miles:

"This is an awful development. What do you make of it?"

Miles paused, debating in his mind whether he should answer the question or not.

Then he said, "It seems that either the murderer himself or an accomplice is in the village, and that I shall lay him by the heels before the day is out."

While he was talking, the back door of the inn opened and there appeared the figure of

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a tall man with a gray mustache. He was between fifty or sixty years of age and was wearing a light tweed suit. He carried himself well and his rather stern face was softened by a pair of pleasant blue eyes.

"Good morning, Major," said the landlord, separating himself from the group. "This is a bad business, sir. I wouldn't have had it happen for £100."

"It is a bad business," replied Major Masefield. "What do you make of it?" he continued, glancing at Miles.

"I have just been telling this gentleman that I shall make an arrest before night."

Major Masefield fingered his mustache.

"That's satisfactory, at any rate," he said. "Have you any clue as to ——"

"Perhaps you will come into the parlor?" interjected Miles.

They moved toward the house and, as the Major entered, Miles, who was behind, beckoned privately to O'Farrel to follow him.

"I'd like you to hear this," he said in a low voice.

The three men seated themselves in the inn parlor and Miles appeared to grow incautiously garrulous.

"Well, Major," he said, "I have discovered a great deal, I think, considering I have only had an hour to work on the matter."

He drew an envelope from his pocket and with a lead-pencil made little strokes on the back to emphasize each step of progress.

"First," he said, "the coffin was taken from the window between three and four o'clock in the morning. It was placed on Stringer's cart, the wheels of which had been previously oiled on purpose for the journey. Two men assisted in the work, though I can find traces of only one."

"It would be impossible for one man to get the coffin from that room into a cart beneath," interposed the Major.

"I quite agree," returned Miles.

"After the coffin was placed on Stringer's cart, it was driven out and up toward the left, up the crossroad. I was able to trace it for two hundred yards, but at the crossroads the wheel-tracks ceased. All these roads have only just been metaled, therefore it may have proceeded in any one of three directions."

There was a pause and then the Major spoke:

"You found no footprints?"

"I found the footprints," said Miles, "of all the persons who were present last night when the body was found. You don't mind me asking you, Major, but do you possess a chestnut horse?"

"Why do you ask?" returned the Major, his eyelids flickering a little at the suddenness of the question. There was a silence.

"Yes," he answered.

"Was this horse shod last Tuesday by Ezra Lion?"

"I think it was," answered Major Masefield after a pause.

"It was your horse, Major, that drew Stringer's cart bearing the coffin!"

"But that's impossible!" said the Major, springing to his feet.

"I understand," said Miles formally, "that owing to the fact that your hay has been stolen occasionally you fitted that particular stable with a combination lock."

"Quite true," said Major Masefield, "and the word 'Silk' must be spelt to open the lock. The combination is known only to myself, my coachman and the groom. Therefore you must be mistaken about the horse."

"I am afraid not," said Miles. "Ezra Lion, the blacksmith, instantly knew the marks of those new shoes he had fitted."

"In that case," said the Major, "some one must have discovered the combination. This thing disturbs me very much. I am certain my groom and the coachman know nothing whatever of this matter."

He was standing at the table with his hand resting upon it, and he looked down at Miles, who remained seated.

"Have you any other clue?" he asked Miles, not knowing what else to say.

"I have made several observations," said Miles, "but I thought I ought to let you know about the lock at once."

"Yes, yes," said the Major; "thank you. As you may guess, I am very much disturbed indeed. If you wish my coachman and groom they are at your service, and, of course, I myself will assist you in every way possible. Mr. Yannion was a friend of mine; I had known him since childhood and, if we had our little differences, I always entertained a very sincere affection for him. The news of his death last night was a great blow to me, and this strange, uncanny disappearance strikes me as awful. I have not yet broken the news to my daughter——" he glanced at O'Farrel and broke off.

"I understand," commented Miles.

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When Major Masefield had gone, closing the little parlor door after him, Detective Miles turned to O'Farrel:

"That combination lock is going to be a godsend to me!"

"Perhaps," said O'Farrel thoughtfully, "but for all that I don't think Major Masefield has had a hand in this affair."

"Did I appear to suggest that?" asked Miles with interest.

"That was the impression you gave me," returned O'Farrel. "And, by the way, why did you invite me in here to listen to the conversation?"

Miles glanced at O'Farrel, and put the envelope on which he had been drawing lines back into his pocket. He smiled. It was the first time O'Farrel had seen him smile, but he said nothing.

PRECISELY three minutes after Major Masefield left the inn a second hot breakfast was placed upon the table for Detective Miles. As the detective ate, he still talked, for his mood of garrulity had not yet left him.

"Boyle you said your name was?" he questioned.

O'Farrel nodded.

"Been a sea-faring man?" went on Miles.

O'Farrel nodded again.

"How do you reckon you got that blow on your arm last night?"

"I don't know," returned O'Farrel quickly, "but I'd like to meet the man who gave it to me."

"I'll give you his address," said Miles.

O'Farrel came quickly to his feet. He was not a revengeful man, but there are certain injuries that cry aloud for retribution, and he felt that the cowardly blow of last night was one of them.

"Some other time," went on Miles, drinking his tea.

There was a pause, then Miles spoke again.

"Did the fellow say anything to you before he struck you?"

O'Farrel repeated the words of his assailant.

They fell into general conversation after this. Miles was still communicative, with sudden unexpected reticences. He gave O'Farrel a short chronicle of the village. The Yannions had lived there for four hundred years and the dead man was the last of his race.

"They were a fizzled-out lot," said Miles, "but they'd got sort of rooted into the place. The people here would do anything for the Squire. You heard old Joseph Gospel last night. His brother Bernard is the same. He was named Bernard after the young Squire. They were born the same year. Then there's Ezra Lion, the blacksmith. His family had served the Yannions, father and son, for three hundred years. Lion's nephew was Yannion's valet, and only left the Squire's service about a week before his master's disappearance, and the lawyers sent me down here."

He talked on, then, explaining how he had gradually moved from clue to clue until he had discovered the body in the depths of the well. He spoke of the impossibility of placing credence on local information.

"They always exaggerate or minimize. It's self-deception most of the time—a sort of mental illusion, like the optical trick of guessing how many inches a silk hat will reach from the floor."

Miles rose from his chair and removed the napkin that had been tucked in his waistcoat. There were two bottles of beer behind him on the sideboard. He turned.

"Here's another deceptive trick," he said. "How far round do you think you can span these bottles?"

"I don't know," said O'Farrel; "it's a thing I've never tried."

"You can't span them within an inch," returned Miles.

O'Farrel placed his hand round the body of the nearest bottle and held it up. The detective smiled.

"You see!" he said.

"Can you do it?" asked O'Farrel.

The detective took by the neck the bottle O'Farrel had spanned and placed it carefully on the sideboard. For his own experiment he used the second bottle, which he held up before O'Farrel.

"Deceptive, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes," answered O'Farrel, smiling in his turn, and he took the bottle he had spanned and, using the detective's serviette, very thoroughly erased his thumb and finger prints from its surface.

"If you really want my finger-prints," he said, looking Miles squarely in the eyes, "you can ask for them."

Miles was imperturbable as ever. He took from his pocket the envelope he had

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been scribbling on, and began to rub it with a pencil.

"If it's all the same to you," he said, and handed the envelope to O'Farrel.

O'Farrel gratified him by placing his left thumb heavily on the penciled surface and then repeating the pressure on a page of Miles' pocketbook.

"I am very much obliged to you," said Miles with a sudden change to a tone of intimacy.

As O'Farrel impressed his thumb on the page he noticed on the opposite leaf of the open pocketbook, the tailed end of a penciled letter initialed "A. F. M."

"I am afraid this won't be much use," returned O'Farrel, handing back the pocketbook, "I am quite unknown in the annals of crime."

THERE was a pause. Then Miles suddenly asked O'Farrel whether he would care to come with him to check the footprints he had observed in the vicinity of the yard. They went out together and Miles indicated the footprints of Bernard and Joseph Gospel, of the blacksmith, and of the others who had been there.

"The cart came out of the yard," said Miles, recounting what he believed took place, "with the driver seated on it, and there has been no trace of a stranger's footsteps anywhere."

"Why do you want me to see the footprints?" asked O'Farrel curiously.

"Well," answered Miles, "to tell the truth, you're a well-built fellow and this isn't the sort of village that it's healthy for a stranger to be alone in."

"I've noticed it myself," said O'Farrel.

Miles began to examine the road leading past Yannion House, and the crossroads to the village church, in the churchyard of which O'Farrel had found harborage. As they moved forward, the detective pointed out the imprints of Major Masefield's horse and the wheelmarks of Stringer's cart, the broken tire of which had given him a clue to its ownership.

At the crossroads they lost all trace of the cart-wheels. They met none of the villagers during their progress and O'Farrel, who was a little in advance (Miles was examining the right, and he the left side of the road), suddenly stopped, for, almost at his feet, he saw the light imprints of a pair of boots, the owner of which at that point left the grass at the edge of the road, crossed the road diagonally, and passed on to the common. O'Farrel glanced at Miles who had not yet seen these new footprints. Furtively he put forth his foot and laid it exactly on the imprint nearest him. Then he repressed a sudden startled exclamation. The footprints on the road were those of his own boots!

He tested them again to make doubly sure of the truth. He had never in his life been along that road. He had never crossed diagonally on to the common, and yet these footprints seemed to give the lie even to his own perfect knowledge.

Miles was nearing him, and with an instinct of self-preservation, O'Farrel suddenly crossed the road at exactly the angle of the imprints he had discovered. Then he returned over the same ground.

"What is it?" asked Miles. "I thought you had discovered something when you made that rush."

"Oh, no, nothing at all," said O'Farrel.

Then it suddenly flashed into his mind that he had put out his boots at the inn to be cleaned, and that during the night some one had taken those boots and had worn them. That was his idea at the moment. A few hours later, however, a new and disturbing light broke in on him.

CHAPTER VI

A VISIT TO THE BLACKSMITH

HOW O'Farrel came to reveal his identity to a stranger, and under what circumstances, may be told in a few words.

He was standing that afternoon in Major Masefield's charming drawing-room, with its paneled walls, its pin-shaded lights, and its general air of refined opulence, when the door opened and Major Masefield entered, wearing the gray suit he had appeared in at the inn that morning. He looked a little surprised at seeing O'Farrel standing there.

"You wish to see me?" he asked quietly.

"Upon rather a delicate personal matter."

The Major looked at him doubtfully.

"Connected with yourself," went on O'Farrel. "It is in regard to some letters you wrote to the late Mr. Yannion."

Major Masefield's head jerked involuntarily, almost imperceptibly.

"Letters!"

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"Your daughter destroyed them yesterday, but unfortunately she was too late. This morning I happened to notice that Detective Miles had copies of them in his pocketbook. Your initials, I believe, are A. F. M."

Major Masefield came to his feet. He was distinctly paler and there ensued a pause before he spoke again.

"What—what is your object in giving me this information?" he said.

"I wish for your advice," said O'Farrel. "Detective Miles suspects you, but something has happened which may cause him to suspect me as well."

Major Masefield summed up the younger man with a keen glance. He saw a pair of candid, grave, blue eyes which returned his gaze frankly, and a handsome clean-shaven face, weather-beaten to a deep brown. O'Farrel's black hair was cropped close, but this fashion suited him. The coat he wore certainly did nothing to set off his build, but altogether he made a very presentable, not to say engaging, figure, and Masefield was now impressed as his daughter had been the evening before.

"My name is not Boyle," said O'Farrel presently. "At least, that is only my Christian name. Until yesterday I was Lieutenant O'Farrel in command of a submarine in his Majesty's navy."

Then he related the unfortunate series of events which had led up to his desertion from *X15*.

"The muddle in the accounts was pure carelessness on my part," he went on, "but it was necessary to prove that to the satisfaction of my commander, and I was unable to do it. My father, who is a retired admiral of the old school, was appalled when I told him the situation in which I found myself. I told him by letter and in return I got a wire from the old fellow in which he said: 'You know what an O'Farrel should do, do it.'"

There was a pause, then Major Masefield spoke:

"He is a fine old fellow, your father!"

"He is the best in the world," returned O'Farrel, "but I did not do as he told me. I was too fond of life, and, besides, I was not guilty. I decided to disappear from the navy and make a new future in Canada under another name."

Major Masefield went to a small table and took up that day's *Morning Post*. He searched its pages for a minute and then held it out to O'Farrel with a smile.

"It is always interesting to read one's own obituary notice," he said.

O'Farrel glanced at the paragraph indicated.

NAVAL OFFICER DROWNED

Last night, between six and seven o'clock, when a small submarine flotilla, accompanied by H.M.S *Icarus*, was passing Hartpool Pier, Lieutenant Boyle O'Farrel, in command of Submarine *X15*, was washed overboard and drowned. The body of the unfortunate officer has not yet been discovered.

MAJOR MASEFIELD, now that this indisputable proof had corroborated O'Farrel's frank and candid admissions, held out his hand.

"O'Farrel," he said warmly, "I shall be glad to have you for a friend. I am sure Fate has cast us together for a good purpose."

"I am sure of that, too," said O'Farrel, grasping the elder man's hand firmly.

Then he told Masefield that part of the story which he had hitherto kept to himself. The meeting with Masefield's daughter, the burned letters, how he had acquired Yannion's clothes and boots, and finally of those mysterious footprints which had crossed the road diagonally and disappeared on the common.

"You say the footprints were identical with those of the boots you are wearing?" asked the Major.

"Absolutely!"

"They are Yannion's boots?"

O'Farrel nodded.

"Then I have it," said Major Masefield, and a look of triumph flashed into his eyes.

There was a pause.

"Well?" said O'Farrel, almost impatiently.

Major Masefield laid his doubled fist heavily on the little table at his side.

"Bernard Yannion was murdered by his valet!"

"That is my opinion exactly," confirmed O'Farrel.

Major Masefield stared into the fire for a few minutes and a cloud gathered on his brow.

"There are several weak points to our hypothesis," he said at last. "In the first place, there was no apparent motive for the murder, and certainly none for stealing the body—a horrible and gruesome thing to do."

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He had taken a cigar and was lighting it slowly, looking at O'Farrel over the flame of his match.

"Then there is the fact," he went on, "that the fellow was seen to leave the village ten days before the disappearance of his master."

"I have thought of that," said O'Farrel, "and it is a matter that might pay us to investigate." He remembered what Miles had said as to the reliability of the ordinary villager. "Did he leave the village before Yannion met his death?" he added.

"I think Ezra Lion, the local blacksmith," said Masefield, "is the man who can help us. Yannion's valet was his nephew."

"With your permission," said O'Farrel, "we will catechise the blacksmith."

And in less than twenty minutes Major Masefield's motor-brougham drew to a standstill before Ezra Lion's cottage. There was a light shining from the blacksmith's parlor window. Masefield knocked and without waiting for an answer opened the door into the living-room.

The blacksmith was seated close to a table on which was a brass lamp with an opaque white shade. On his left fist, which was thrust forward in the light of the lamp, bulked a gray woolen stocking, which he was mending with deft fingers. He was wearing a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles. He glanced up as the Major and O'Farrel entered, and, drawing the stocking from his hand, gave a curt "Good evening" in answer to Masefield's greeting.

"We've come to see you," said the Major, "about your nephew."

If the blacksmith felt any surprise at this sudden visit it had left him, for, with rough politeness, he brought up chairs for the Major and O'Farrel, and when they were all seated Masefield went on:

"We thought perhaps you might have heard from him."

"I've 'eard from 'im often," answered the blacksmith calmly.

Masefield was a little non-plussed.

"Er—lately?"

"Last week," answered Lion shortly.

There was another pause, then Ezra Lion rose and took an old-fashioned mahogany tea-caddy from the high mantel-shelf.

"I don't doubt it's about this affair of Mr. Yannion," he said with every appearance of calmness, "so if you want to read my nephew's letters there they are—all of them."

"Thank you, Lion," said Masefield, "that's very accommodating of you."

There were eight letters in all, written from North Allerton. The handwriting was heavy and labored, and the spelling rather more defective than one might expect even from the modern schoolboy.

O'Farrel and the Major were chiefly occupied with the dates of the letters, and the Major, with a motion of his hand, indicated two letters written from North Allerton previous to Yannion's disappearance.

"You don't happen," said O'Farrel, looking at Lion, "to have the envelopes of these letters by you?"

"I burned 'em," replied the blacksmith shortly.

"I'm afraid that sweeps away our theory," said Major Masefield, as O'Farrel and he stepped into the motor a few minutes later. "You see his nephew was already in North Allerton before Yannion disappeared."

"I should imagine we could test the truth of that," said O'Farrel, "by a call at the post-office. A village postmistress generally has an interest in other people's business. And it is a little strange that Lion failed to keep the envelopes."

MRS. YOUNG, the postmistress, was delighted to find a motor-car stopping at her door at such an hour of the night. She was even more delighted to have a finger in the mystery that was disturbing the village and turning every yokel in the countryside into an amateur detective. When Major Masefield asked his first question she put a finger on her long nose and thought for a minute.

"Ezra Lion?" she said. "Ezra Lion? He had his insurance receipt on the sixth of the month. It was a couple of days later than usual, and 'e's had 'is *Farrier's Gazette* regularly. But he 'asn't 'ad any other letter through the post for a month past."

Masefield glanced quickly at O'Farrel, then turned to Mrs. Young again.

"I suppose you can't remember where that letter came from?"

"Liverpool," answered Mrs. Young promptly.

"That proves," said Masefield, when he and O'Farrel were once again in the motor-car, "that both the blacksmith and his nephew are deep in this mystery."

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"Incidentally," said O'Farrel, "it removes suspicion from you."

"I wish I could fathom the mystery of that combination lock," said Masefield a little later, in a low thoughtful voice. "The combination was known practically to no one and certainly not to Yannion's valet. Ezra Lion of course, being a blacksmith, might have a knack of such things, but it seems scarcely likely."

As he spoke, the car passed the dark, sinister frontage of Yannion House. O'Farrel leaned forward, his eyes fixed upon it.

"If I could be there for a month," he said, as if half speaking to himself, "I'd guarantee to solve this mystery. But you are passing my inn," he ejaculated a minute later as the car sped along.

"Yes, you are dining with us to-night," marked Masefield cordially, and he laid a friendly hand on O'Farrel's shoulder.

CHAPTER VII

DISCOVERIES IN THE YANNION VAULT

AS A CONSEQUENCE of his chance remark in the motor-brougham, O'Farrel found himself, a fortnight later, installed as the tenant of Yannion House. Major Masefield was willing to go to any expense to remove the suspicion that still rested upon him. For if O'Farrel and Jessica believed him innocent, Detective Miles did not, and it was singular how Miles' suspicions seemed to have spread through the district, though he had never mentioned them to any one. Masefield experienced no difficulty in renting Yannion House from the solicitors and O'Farrel took possession with Joseph Gospel, Yannion's faithful old lodge-keeper, as a servant. Other servants were lent by Masefield, who with O'Farrel, on the first day of occupation, made a close search of the mansion from cellars to attics.

They found only one thing, however, that might bear on the crime, and that was on the third-floor landing. Here, beneath an armoire of miscellaneous weapons, they came upon a fifteenth-century mace, lying on the coconut matting. The nail that had supported it had been wrenched from the wall. That was the only indication of violence and was in itself problematical, as the weapon might have dragged out the nail by its own weight.

When O'Farrel had occupied Yannion House a fortnight, Detective Miles and the county police, now excessively active and bustling, were still searching for the body of the murdered man. O'Farrel, having an uneasy feeling that Miles was slowly enveloping Masefield in a net, worked with all his energy to lay the crime at the door of the missing valet.

The things that told against Masefield were the combination lock, the fact of his horse being used to convey the body, and above all those violent letters.

Against the valet, on the other hand, stood the facts, which they now knew, that he was a man of doubtful character and that his uncle, the blacksmith, was trying to shield him.

O'Farrel came upon his great clue in the simplest manner in the world. The footprints crossing diagonally on to the common always seemed to him to be the pivot from which should radiate all his investigations. Thus one day his search lead him to the wall of the churchyard; here he found certain marks that caused him to spring back with excitement. A few minutes later he was in the churchyard itself. The sexton, a bent old man, gruesomely garrulous about his profession, came up to him.

"That's where the Marchambleys used to bury," he said, pointing to a gloomy building. "They be dead and done with long ago. Long before my time. That other smaller 'ouse," he went on, "is where the Yannions bury. I put the old Squire in ten years ago. Six feet down he is. I reckon I be done out of the young Mr. Yannion." He broke into a crackling laugh.

O'Farrel gave him a shilling and hurried out of the graveyard. A quarter of an hour later he strode into Masefield's drawing-room.

"The body's hidden in the Yannion vault!" he said.

"You've found it?" gasped the Major.

"No, but I know it's there," went on O'Farrel. "I'll bet everything. Is there any way of getting a key?"

"The Vicar's sure to have one."

In another five minutes they were in the motor-brougham, speeding toward the vicarage.

O'Farrel found himself in a fever of excitement. He would not admit, even to himself, that his assertion was the merest conjecture and that there were a hundred chances against its being right.

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A maid-servant opened the vicar's door, and told them calmly that Mr. Motfield was out, dining with some friends three miles away.

O'Farrel had communicated his excitement to Masefield by now.

"That parson's got to get us the key," said the Major to O'Farrel, "even if he has to go without his dinner to get it."

The speed made by Masefield's motor-brougham in search of the missing vicar not only exceeded the limit but more than doubled it.

The Reverend Mr. Motfield had just spread his serviette upon his knees when he was beckoned away by his host.

IT WAS seven o'clock and quite dark when at last O'Farrel held the coveted key in his fingers.

The motor-car was drawn up at the roadside near the church. Masefield put out one of the lamps and took it with him into the graveyard. When they came to the broad iron-studded door of the burying-place O'Farrel had his first doubt.

"I may be wrong," he said in a whisper. "This is only a guess of mine, after all."

"What was that?" asked Masefield in a low tone.

"I said it was only a guess," answered O'Farrel.

"I mean *that*," whispered Masefield, and pointed to the iron-studded door.

As they listened, a faint sound seemed to penetrate from the interior of the vault.

For a minute the two men stared at each other in the darkness, doubting their ears. The sound was not repeated. Then Masefield gave a little laugh.

"Nerves," he said and, shielding the motor-lamp from the wind, struck a match and lit it.

"It may have been fancy," said O'Farrel, "but it's as well to take no chances."

He inserted the big key in the lock. Masefield stood back a pace or two, and the circle of his lamp glared on the closed door.

O'Farrel drew a revolver from his hip pocket and held it in his right hand; with his left he turned the key in the lock, then suddenly thrust open the door with a drive of his foot.

They found themselves confronted by a bare-walled chamber, twelve feet square. From the threshold Masefield circled the room with his light. Suddenly his light remained still and they both gave an exclamation.

Directly before them on a stone slab, against the far wall of the chamber, was a new coffin. The dazzling light of the motor-lamp twinkled on its polished surface.

"By Gad," said the Major, under his breath, "you were right, after all!"

There was no doubt of it; the coffin was the one containing Yannion's body!

They entered the grim chamber and partly closed the door behind them. Their feet sank in a deep layer of silver sand. There was nothing whatever in the vault except the new coffin, resting on the slab projecting from the far wall. On this wall, and on the others there were marble and brass tablets bearing laudatory epitaphs of former members of the Yannion family.

"What do you make of it?" asked Masefield in a low tone.

"I think the blacksmith or the valet or both of them hid him here to prevent an inquest or identification."

"It's a strange business," whispered Masefield, taking out a handkerchief and wiping his forehead. "This place gets on my nerves."

O'Farrel had replaced the revolver in his hip pocket, but at that precise moment his hand flew to it again suddenly. He and Masefield stepped apart, the motor-lamp shook in Masefield's hands, a distinct sound had made itself audible in the interior of the vault, quite near them.

"Swing your lamp," said O'Farrel quickly.

The Major did so, and they saw nothing —nothing but the shining coffin on the stone slab. At that moment O'Farrel, who had his back to the wall, glanced up, and among the tangle of rafters above he saw a pale face peering down at them!

O'Farrel raised his revolver.

"Come down out of that!" he called. "Masefield, we've got him! Close the door!" The elder man shut the heavy barred door. "Come down!" called O'Farrel again.

The man above them made no movement. Then Masefield turned the full glare of the light on him, and they discovered that he was lying at full length on a beam that crossed the vault. His face was hidden from view. He was moving now; in a moment he swung from the beam by his hands —a man of moderate height, wearing a black morning coat and dusty black trousers.

"Miles!" ejaculated O'Farrel as the man

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dropped lightly to the sanded floor. He slipped his revolver into his hip pocket and gave a laugh.

"I shall be obliged if you will hand that to me," said Miles in a steady, triumphant voice. He held out his hand for O'Farrel's revolver, then he looked at Major Masefield. "I've been waiting for you to come here every night for the last week," he went on. "You see that little affair of the combination lock came in useful, after all." He peered sharply into Masefield's eyes.

"You don't mean——" Masefield broke off and fell back a pace.

"I mean," went on Miles, "the fact that your horse drew the body to this place, and that this man," he glanced at O'Farrel, "fell into my trap and tried to obliterate his footmarks passing diagonally on to the Common, has placed me in the position to arrest the murderer and his accomplice!"

Detective Miles' air of triumph was unmistakable. It was that of a man who has achieved a task worthy of the mightiest in his profession. He had sufficient imagination to see himself driving Major Masefield into Wallbridge and handing his prisoner over to justice. The picture pleased him. He rubbed his hands together and almost smiled. But O'Farrel had not handed him the revolver and at that moment he gripped the detective firmly by the shoulder.

"LOOK here, Miles," he said, "do you think you're going to arrest us both?"

"Not at the moment," answered Miles coolly. "To-night I shall content myself with taking this gentleman to Wallbridge and handing him over to the police."

"You will do nothing of the kind!" replied O'Farrel sharply.

Masefield moved from where he was standing and stood near O'Farrel, who spoke again.

"You are very persevering and dogged, Miles, but you are on the wrong track. This gentleman is no more guilty of the murder than you are. You are no doubt thinking of the letters, copies of which you have in your note-book, and of other little pieces of evidence you have managed to scrape together."

Miles was buttoning his morning coat with an air of calm aloofness and dignity. He glanced at Major Masefield.

"Now, sir," he said, "we must be getting out of this."

He made a step toward Masefield, but O'Farrel intervened.

"You won't be getting out of this for quite a long time!" he said, thrusting his face close to Miles.

The detective drew back a step. O'Farrel followed him, whipped out his revolver and thrust it toward Miles' face until the barrel was within an inch of his nose.

Masefield raised the lamp and its pallid glare threw the two men into dazzling prominence.

"Throw up your hands!" said O'Farrel in a low angry voice. He turned to the Major. "Masefield," he said, "he's got a pistol in his hip pocket; take it out!"

Miles' hands twitched.

"Put them above your head," whispered O'Farrel in a voice that sent a chill down the detective's spine. Masefield had secured Miles' revolver.

"Now," said O'Farrel, "this gentleman, Major Masefield, is a friend of mine. As long as I'm in this district you won't arrest him. He has suffered enough misery and humiliation through the spying and peering and implications that have been cast upon him by you. There is going to be an end!"

"Here, here!" said the detective, shaking his head as if to dismiss all this talk. "Anybody would think it was you who were here to arrest me!" He lowered his arms.

"As a matter of fact that's what I'm going to do," said O'Farrel. "Major Masefield and I have a clue which we intend to follow, and I am going to lock you up in this vault until we have satisfied ourselves whether this clue leads us to the murderer or not."

"Bluff!" said Miles, straightening the end of his disorderly mustache.

"Just step outside, Masefield," said O'Farrel.

Masefield opened the vault door and stepped into the outer darkness. Miles made to follow him, and O'Farrel seized him by the collar and held him back at arm's length. Then Miles, seeing that there was no help for it, became reasonable.

"Look here," said Miles, "you've made me look like a fool. I grant that, and there's no way out of it. I'll give you a week before I do anything. But after that——" His eyes narrowed.

O'Farrel glanced at Masefield, who was

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still glaring the motor-lamp on them from the doorway of the vault.

"He says he won't attempt to interfere with us for a week. That seems a satisfactory notion, don't you think?"

"Quite," answered Masefield. "By that time we shall have solved the whole mystery."

"I want your word that you won't try to get away," said Miles, ignoring O'Farrel and looking at Masefield, whose face was in the darkness.

Masefield gave his word, and five minutes later the three men were crossing the graveyard together toward the village. It was a strange situation, for one of them firmly believed himself to be in the presence of Bernard Yannion's murderer.

O'Farrel was bent on shaking that belief and he told the detective how he and Major Masefield had come to suspect Bernard Yannion's former valet. Miles dismissed this hypothesis with scorn. He explained that he had carefully probed it in every possible way.

The station official, who had seen the valet leave, had been subjected to searching inquiries by him. Stringer, who had driven the discharged valet to the station, had given his evidence and finally the blacksmith had showed Miles the letters he had received from his nephew in North Allerton while Yannion was still alive.

"Did you see the envelopes of the letters?" asked O'Farrel, when the detective had reached this point of his story.

"No," said Miles. "There weren't any envelopes." Seeing that the detective had not quite grasped his meaning, he went on: "Major Masefield and I saw those letters some time ago. They were written by Ezra Lion himself, who had received no letters from North Allerton or anywhere else for a month."

"How do you know that?" broke in Miles with sudden interest.

"If you would like to satisfy yourself on that point," said O'Farrel, "Mrs. Young, the postmistress, can help you."

"I'll go to her at once," said Miles.

They had reached the motor-brougham by now, and Major Masefield handed the extinguished lamp he was carrying to his chauffeur, who re-lit it and replaced it on the front of the car.

"The last letter," said O'Farrel, taking the detective aside and speaking in a low voice, "Ezra Lion received through the post reached him more than a month ago, and was not from North Allerton at all, but from Liverpool. And, by the way, those footprints you saw crossing the road were not mine at all. They were made by a man wearing a pair of boots formerly belonging to Mr. Yannion—the man, in fact, who hid the coffin in the vault!"

A smile flashed across Detective Miles' face.

"That's just what I've been telling you," he said, "and I happen to know the man who was wearing Mr. Yannion's boots."

CHAPTER VIII

AN ARREST IS MADE

IT WAS nearly ten o'clock that night, and the Major and O'Farrel were seated before the fire in Masefield's drawing-room, discussing Detective Miles' attitude toward them. A maid entered. Mr. Miles wished to see Mr. Boyle, if convenient, she said. A minute later Miles entered the room, holding his silk hat by the brim. His manner had entirely changed. It was friendly to the point of conciliation; under his arm he carried a brown paper parcel.

"I beg your pardon," he said looking at O'Farrel, "but you were right about those letters, and I think your case against the valet looks like leading us on the right track."

Major Masefield motioned him to be seated and the three men faced one another round the hearth. Miles told of a second visit he had paid to the churchyard that night.

"I had a sort of feeling," he said, "when we came out of the vault, that we were being watched, and after I found out about the letters I went back there, and found the door of the burying-place four or five inches open. If you remember, we locked it when we came away. I was standing there puzzling about this, when the door was suddenly flung open and a man, carrying a parcel, sprang out like a flash! Of course, I did not waste any time in making after him, but he was about the swiftest runner I have ever come across, and I was five yards behind when he climbed into the road and disappeared round the corner of a barn.

"That was the end of him as far as I was concerned. He seemed to vanish into thin air. It was almost as if the earth had opened

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and swallowed him. I think he must have managed to get into the barn, but there was no door at that side, and there was no cover at all for a good many yards. Well, after that I decided to find out what he had been up to and went back to examine the vault. Yannion's coffin-lid had been moved and I found this pair of boots lying in the sand."

He drew from the brown paper parcel he had brought; a pair of sodden boots. They were well made, smart boots, and O'Farrel in an instant recognized them as similar to the pair he had once borrowed from Yannion House.

"What do you make of it all?" asked Miles. He ignored Major Masefield and questioned O'Farrel.

"Of course the boots had been removed from the body?" asked O'Farrel.

"Yes," returned Miles. .

"Then," said O'Farrel, "I think this brings us still nearer to the missing valet; from your description it was not the blacksmith who was hiding in the vault."

"No, it was a young man," said Miles.

Masefield spoke now.

"I am afraid this is all far beyond me," he said. "I do not see why he should want to remove the boots from the body."

"Well," summed up O'Farrel, "if he had succeeded in removing the boots and the clothes, the body would soon be beyond identification. My opinion is that Miles disturbed the man before he had finished what he went there to do."

Masefield, oppressed by these grim happenings, asked:

"What are you going to do next?"

"Miles is going to make an arrest," answered O'Farrel calmly.

The detective flashed a quick glance at him.

"I think," went on O'Farrel, "it would be as well, if we are not too late, to drop in for a little chat with the blacksmith."

A quarter of an hour later O'Farrel, alone, entered Ezra Lion's cottage. This plan had been arranged among them, and Miles and Masefield were to follow ten minutes later.

O'Farrel had formulated no particular plan, but he felt certain in his mind that a further examination of the blacksmith might bring him nearer to the truth. He also felt a vague hope that he might find some clue as to the whereabouts of the swift fugitive who had eluded them.

The blacksmith did not answer to O'Farrel's first knock. He knocked again, then opened the door and entered the little parlor.

Ezra Lion was seated as before, near the white-shaded lamp, with a gray stocking on his fist, which he mended with deft thrusts of his needle. He glanced up and into O'Farrel's eyes. He betrayed no surprise, but the scar on his face turned a dull purple and then grew livid again. He drew the stocking from his hand and rose.

"Come in," he said with an air of cordiality, "come in."

O'Farrel seated himself and began to talk in friendly, easy tones. He knew that he was in the presence of the man who had struck him from behind on the night that Yannion's body was discovered in the well. For no other man in the village possessed an arm that could have delivered that blow. Both men were conscious of being engaged in a duel of words.

EZRA LION was cunning and courageous, but he was fighting a losing battle, and he was prepared to fight desperately. He racked his wits to find a reason for this second visit and it was imperative that he should get O'Farrel away, yet he dared not show his anxiety. They talked, as two chance acquaintances might talk in a railway-carriage.

O'Farrel had seated himself opposite Lion, and scarcely a yard separated them. He offered the blacksmith a cigarette, which the other refused. The lamp on the table shone into Lion's watchful eyes, and he turned his chair a little. O'Farrel had exhausted his small talk and there fell a pause. The clock struck ten. Lion started and glanced at it.

"I must be getting to bed, sir, if you don't mind," he said. "Mine's early work."

"I won't keep you," said O'Farrel and he took up his hat.

At that moment the latch of the door was raised softly behind him, and Ezra Lion, with a movement of stealth and swiftness that was amazing, blew out the white-shaded lamp. Darkness fell and before O'Farrel could move from his chair Ezra Lion sprang at his throat. His powerful hands found the younger man's neck and closed upon it.

O'Farrel, carrying the chair with him, crashed back to the floor, and the black-

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smith was upon him, tightening his grip at every moment. In the darkness O'Farrel could hear him making a sucking sound with his lips. He knew he had no chance against those hands, and he remained still. It was the greatest effort of his life to refrain from struggling, but his only chance lay in strategy—in appearing to be stunned.

O'Farrel, staring at the ceiling, his eyes starting from his head, saw nothing, but presently in the darkness came a whispered voice, and the blacksmith's answer to it.

"Ezra, is it all right?"

"No, no! Go away! For God's sake, go away!"

"What?" came the voice.

"I've got one of them here," said Ezra. "Go! Go!" His voice rose in desperate urgency.

There was a pause, then the cottage door closed as softly as it had been opened. Light, swift footsteps passed down the front garden, and silence fell.

O'Farrel, lying on his back with those hands grasping his throat, heard Ezra give a sigh of relief. The hands relaxed ever so little, but O'Farrel was too cautious to move. Minutes seemed to pass—minutes during which O'Farrel's strength, under the relaxed pressure of the hand, gradually returned to him.

That strange sucking noise began again, then O'Farrel flung up his arms and clasped Lion round the body. He knew that if he could press the man's body close to his, those powerful arms would be more or less out of action. In general strength and agility he was far superior to Ezra Lion, who was entirely chest and biceps. There ensued a wild struggle on the floor for a minute. Lion made savage attempts to thrust O'Farrel from him, but he was clasped in an embrace almost as powerful as his own, and he gave in at last; the strength seemed to ooze out of him and he collapsed.

"Let me go!" he gasped, half dead with exhaustion. "Let me up! I'm done."

But O'Farrel was in no mood to trust him, and he kept a firm grip on his collar from behind during the time Ezra Lion was lighting the lamp again under his direction.

Then O'Farrel let him go and drew the pistol from his pocket.

"Sit down!" he commanded.

Ezra was sucking in deep breaths. He seemed to have grown suddenly old and wan and feeble. He hung on his chair brokenly, but there was an exultant light in his eyes.

"You'll be arrested for this," said O'Farrel, dandling his revolver.

But Ezra Lion did not wince. A gentle expression even came into his face; his old eyes lighted up again, this time tenderly.

"You can do what you like with me. It's all over now—he's safe. To-morrow he'll be miles away—you'll never catch him."

"You seem to be inordinately fond of this precious nephew," retorted O'Farrel.

"Ah," the blacksmith opened his mouth, and nodded his head as if at something passing in his own mind. A wry smile twisted his lips. They sat thus, captor and captive, until Miles and Major Masefield entered.

O'Farrel explained briefly what had happened, and that night Ezra Lion, handcuffed and seated between Bernard Gospel, the village constable, and Detective Miles, was driven off to Wallbridge to be charged with being accessory to the murder of Bernard Yannion.

The news spread like wildfire through the village. The fatuous Stringer's star set forever, and Mrs. Young, the postmistress, whose evidence had brought about this swift dénouement, soared into refulgent brilliance.

CHAPTER IX

O'FARREL MAKES A CONFESSION

FOLLOWING the arrest of Ezra Lion, events moved rapidly. There had already been an inquest, and a formal identification of Yannion's body.

Detectives Miles attended and told the story of the sodden boots that had been discovered in the vault. A second pair of boots had been found in the stagnant waters of the pond near the blacksmith's cottage; but they were supposed to have no connection with the crime, and were not mentioned at the inquest.

Ezra Lion, after being brought before the magistrate at Wallbridge, had been remanded. Everything pointed to the guilt of the blacksmith's nephew. Inquiries of the police at North Allerton had proved that the missing man had never been in that Yorkshire town. Photographs of the supposed murderer were posted outside all the police stations in the country, together with an exact description of his appearance.

It was strange that when things had

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reached this pass O'Farrel should begin to doubt, should begin to wonder whether the police were not on the wrong clue after all. True, he and Masefield had provided that clue, and, at the time of the discovery in the vault, it had seemed to him as the only possible elucidation of the mystery. He found himself growing sorry for Ezra Lion. There had been something fine and tenacious in the man's strong defense of the missing criminal. There had been something almost fanatical in his strong desire to frustrate all search and inquiry.

O'Farrel thought of these things again as he made his way back to Yannion House at night, the day after the inquest—the day on which the body of the unfortunate Bernard Yannion had been interred reverently in the burying-place of his ancestors. The night was cold and the air still; a bright moon was shining, making the lane almost as light as day.

O'Farrel carried his head in the air, he walked lightly, buoyantly, and as he went he turned a score of times to glance at the shining windows of Major Masefield's house. When at last he reached Yannion House the servants were all in bed, with the exception of Joseph Gospel, who opened the door for him, and gave him a friendly "good evening."

O'Farrel, saying he would want nothing further that night, told Gospel to lock up and went to his room. He had allotted himself a bedroom on the first floor over the main entrance of the house. It was a spacious chamber, lighted by four tall and narrow Queen Anne windows. The walls were hung with a pallid silver-tinted paper, evidently an early Victorian attempt to live up to the graceful French furniture, the importation of a former artistic head of the Yannion family.

When O'Farrel entered this room on this night of nights, a lamp was burning on the mantel-shelf and a bright fire blazed in the hearth. His first proceeding was to walk to the mirror and look at himself in the glass. He smiled pleasantly at his reflection, then going to the hearth seated himself in an easy chair and lit a cigarette.

For many minutes he sat contemplating pictures in the fire. These pictures were not imagination, but reality. He relived, as he sat there, the precious hours that had just left him. He saw himself that night as he hung his hat on his accustomed peg in Major Masefield's hall. He saw himself as he entered the charming small drawing-room. Jessica Masefield had extended her hand with her usual smiling welcome. Perhaps there had been a faint increase of cordiality in that sweet smile of hers.

They had sat together, he on one side of the hearth, she on the other. Her father was out that night visiting the Vicar, and Jessica thanked O'Farrel very prettily for the service he had rendered them in leading Miles' suspicions away from her father.

As she spoke she looked away from him and shielded her eyes from the glow of the fire with her slender white hand. It seemed to O'Farrel's imagination that she might almost see through those hands. O'Farrel took her thanks a little uncomfortably. He knew that suspicion would never be entirely removed from Major Masefield until the mystery had been fully exposed in the courts of justice. He told her this, and Jessica confided to him that her father had received almost daily anonymous letters, charging him with the murder and making the most vile accusations.

It was these letters, she said, that had broken his nerve. She reminded him of the case of General Stewart, who a few years ago killed himself because of ill-founded anonymous letters accusing him of the foul murder of his wife. A cloud had settled on Jessica's brow as she talked of these things, but suddenly her eyes lightened and a smile lit up her face.

"I TRUST in you," she said, "to save him, and we both trust in you," she added, as if by an afterthought. The conversation between them began to flag, there were long pauses, those strange intimate pauses that fall between people whose minds are busily occupied with each other. Though no words passed between them, they seemed to make great progress in intimacy.

"Jessica," suddenly whispered O'Farrel, and took the white hand hanging limply over the chair-arm.

She scarcely started, though a glorious warmth suffused her face. It was as if she had veiled herself from him with the petals of roses.

He was kneeling on the hearthrug and holding her hand very firmly in his and looking into her shaded eyes.

"I know I oughtn't to say it," he whis-

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pered, "but, I love you! From the first moment I saw you, when I struck the match in Yannion House, I think I must have loved you. I don't know what you are going to say to me—I don't know what you think of me—but I ask just these few seconds to tell you, for once and all, that I love you—that I shall love you till I die!"

He let fall her hand and rose to his feet before her.

She did not look up. She had not moved, and during the minutes that followed she was motionless as a fairy princess in a dream. It was thus O'Farrel thought of her.

Slowly, as one breaking bonds, as one awaking to life, she moved her head a little. Her eyes looked up into his. Then she rose; her arms were at her sides, her hands palm toward him. He was looking into the deeps of those gray eyes.

Next moment his arms were about her, and he held her close to him.

Jessica gloried in the strength of those arms, holding her firmly, tightly, safely. A busy little clock on the mantel-shelf began to tell them that it was ten o'clock and time to part. But when Love first reveals himself, time counts for nothing.

These were O'Farrel's dreams, and while he dreamed them a man in the corridor was kneeling on the carpet, eying him through the keyhole of his door. For many minutes this figure was still, then it rose, tiptoed along the passage and became lost in the darkness.

"There was some one in the house last night," said Gospel as O'Farrel sat at breakfast next morning.

O'Farrel started and then allowed Gospel to lead him up-stairs until they came at last to Yannion's study, the room in which O'Farrel had first met Jessica. Here he found a secret cupboard in the wall, wide ajar; two despatch-boxes, that had been within, were lying broken open on the floor, and on the hearth-rug was a gaping and battered cash-box.

O'Farrel and Gospel looked at each other in silence.

Then O'Farrel closed the door of the secret cupboard and its edges were almost invisible.

"I shouldn't 'ave thought anybody but Mr. Yannon knowed about that cupboard," said Gospel slowly.

"Nor I," said O'Farrel thoughtfully.

CHAPTER X

THE RETURN

EXACTLY half an hour after the kneeling man applied his eye to the keyhole of O'Farrel's room—that is, at three o'clock in the morning—Jessica Masefield also received a visitor.

After O'Farrel had left her that evening, she and her father sat together in the drawing-room talking for more than an hour, and Jessica told her father of her love for O'Farrel.

Major Masefield was seated at the fireside in his armchair, and Jessica sat at his feet on the hearth-rug. They talked of many things that night; they both felt themselves at the beginning of a new era, and something troubled Jessica's mind.

"Would you be surprised, father, to know that once upon a time I did something that was very, very foolish?"

"I am not in the least curious," said her father, stroking the dark hair resting against his knee.

"It might have been a tragedy," went on Jessica.

Major Masefield laughed a little:

"Well, if it wasn't a tragedy, why think about it now?"

"I won't think about it," said Jessica, reaching up and taking his hand.

A stranger entering that room would have scarcely believed them to be father and daughter; he would have rather thought that here was an elderly and happy bridegroom with an unusually youthful wife.

Masefield had not been conscious of the love that was growing up between his daughter and O'Farrel, but when it came he accepted it philosophically. He made only one request—that they should live near him, so that his old age might be brightened by their company. He was already busy with schemes for O'Farrel's future. He had no desire for his rehabilitation in the navy, even if that proved to be possible, but he knew that O'Farrel was far too energetic and self-reliant to permit himself an idle or dependent life.

"You won't think only of this handsome young sailor of yours!" said Masefield, smiling, after a pause.

Jessica, who was looking dreamily into the fire, squeezed his hand, then rose and kissed her father on the forehead, and as he

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smoked his final cigarette, she made him the customary cup of coco he took as a sedative. They parted at last, tenderly and even more affectionately than usual.

Masefield made his nightly round of the house, and switched off the electric lights. Jessica, alone in her room at last, took from her dress a white rose that O'Farrel had given her. He had lifted it that night from a vase on the table, and telling her that it was like her, had kissed it and pinned it on her dress.

She took the delicate flower now and laid its smooth petals softly against her lips. Then, taking the bedroom tumbler, she filled it with water and placed the rose before her on the dressing-table. She had turned on the lights when she entered the room, but the window-blinds were not drawn and the strong light of the moon cast squares of silver sheen on the carpet.

It was Jessica's custom to ring for her maid immediately she entered her room; but to-night she lingered and looked at herself in the mirror—an odd duplication of ideas, for this was what O'Farrel had done when he entered his room. Jessica caught herself feeling glad that she was pretty, not for her own sake, but for his.

She began to hum a happy little tune, and she whispered secret sweet things to the rose, whose fragrant head nodded toward her. A fancy took her to look out on the night, and she switched the room into darkness.

She heard her father outside, passing to his room at the front of the house. He was whistling softly as he went—he had not whistled for months. Everything in Jessica's room was filled with a dreamy paleness. She pushed open the French window and stepped on to the balcony. The intense moonlight streamed over her like a veil of silver, and she turned up her face to the stars. She was always a lover of the beautiful, but to-night she stood there unconscious of the cold, entranced in the glory of the night.

Jessica reëntered her room at a knock on the door. Her maid was there, rather sleepy and a little cross, wondering why her mistress's bell had not rung. Jessica closed the window.

During the minutes that followed, during the time in which the maid uncoiled and brushed the luxuriant dark hair and prepared her mistress for the night's retirement, Jessica dreamed of her new-found happiness, and the secret she had wished to confide in her father, which had trembled on her lips when O'Farrel had held her in his arms, faded from her mind.

When the maid went at last, and the girl, a frail vision in white, had no illumination in the room except a shaded lamp at her bedside, she opened the French window a few inches as was her custom, then taking the glass containing O'Farrel's rose, placed it at the side of the bed, where she could see it as she fell asleep. She turned off the solitary light at last, and the streaming moonlight lit up the nodding white rose. The last thing she saw as she fell asleep was the gleaming moonlit petals of this flower, the first gift from the man she loved.

Jessica slept with parted lips, showing faintly the white teeth within. Her hair, coiled closely about her head, made her look little more than a child, and the moon, traveling the sky, turned its gold gaze upon her, bringing her sweet features into high relief.

AN HOUR later, the man on his hands and knees advancing toward her bedside made no sound as he moved over the carpet, but Jessica awoke suddenly. She was not afraid of burglars, but she had a horror of ghosts and eery things and strange presences. Premonitions of evil came to her, born of strained nerves and the awful suspicions that had been cast upon her father.

The first thing Jessica noticed when she opened her eyes was that the moon was shining full on her face. O'Farrel's rose was now in darkness, and the French window on the balcony stood wide open. She wondered at this for a second, then, becoming fully conscious and practical, she remembered that the window could not by any chance have come open of itself. She raised herself on one elbow in bed; something was moving on the level of her counterpane—something globular and black. Her heart gave a wild leap, then a face was upturned and looked into hers.

It was a narrow, dark face, with gleaming, small eyes. Jessica knew that face and she gave a scream of agony and horror and leaped from the bed toward the door.

Her scream died in a gasp. A firm hand forced itself over her open mouth, and a strong arm dragged her back. She lived a

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moment in unutterable terror. She struggled like a tortured animal, and a hoarse voice whispered all the time:

"Don't make a noise—don't make a noise! Don't you know me? Don't you know me?"

Jessica felt herself falling through space; a sound as of rushing waters assailed her ears. Then came darkness and quiet. The electric light at her bedside was lit when she opened her eyes again, and standing at her bedside was a slender, narrow-shouldered man, with a sallow face and restless, small eyes.

"Jessica," he whispered, "don't be frightened; for God's sake don't be frightened!"

He seemed prepared to spring at her to stifle her voice if she essayed an alarm.

Jessica stared back into those restless eyes like a bird fascinated by a serpent. She slipped from the bed, and crouching away from him, flattened herself against the wall.

"Don't be afraid," whispered the man again.

"You are not dead? You are alive?"

The whispered words escaped from her, as from her inner consciousness, without volition.

"Yes, yes; of course I'm alive," whispered the man irritably. "Jessica, I know you'll help me. You'll help me, won't you?"

Jessica began to shiver violently.

"We thought you were dead—we all thought you were dead!"

"Of course I wasn't dead! How could I be dead when I'm here talking to you? Do pull yourself together!"

There followed a long pause. Jessica continued to shiver violently, but her thoughts were leaping swiftly through the events of the past. She began to bring this strange sudden visitation into the realms of possibility.

"What do you want?" she asked at last in something approaching her natural voice.

"Money," answered the man.

"Money?" echoed Jessica, in a dull, meaningless fashion.

"And something else," went on the man, "but money first."

Jessica, still shivering, drew the *peignoir* from the chair at her side and pulled it over her shoulders.

There was a pause. They were standing within two yards of each other. Jessica made a faltering step forward, then stopped, and said in an appealing voice:

"You—you won't touch me, Bernard, will you?"

"No, I won't touch you," answered the man, and he backed far away into the middle of the room. Then he changed his mind and went to the door where he stood guard.

"Turn on the lights," said Jessica.

The man obeyed and the room was flooded with light from the branched chandelier overhead.

Jessica went to her desk and with shaking fingers opened a drawer and took out a little box, a trivial thing with shells on the top. She opened it and abstracted its contents—a five-pound note and two sovereigns. These she placed on the corner of the desk and backed away. The man opened the note and looked at it.

"That's no good," he said; "I must have fifty pounds at least."

"It's all I have," said Jessica.

"Then you must get it from your father," answered the man firmly.

"At this hour of the night? I can't. Besides, he keeps very little money in the house."

"You must get what you can," said the man. A threatening note crept into his voice. "And I want something else as well," he continued; "you must get me his revolver. You know the one—the automatic."

"I can't," faltered Jessica. "If I go into his room, he's sure to wake up and then——"

The stranger advanced upon her. He moved over the carpet swiftly and lightly, like a panther.

"Don't make a sound," he whispered between his teeth, and he grasped her cruelly by the wrists. "Remember this, whatever there is between us, you are my wife—and you'll do as I tell you! Do you understand?"

It was true she was his wife, the horror of that had tortured her mind from the moment she saw his face staring into hers from the bedside.

"I'll go!" quavered Jessica.

The man still held her wrists. His feverish eyes were scanning her face.

"Let me go!" pleaded the girl. "Let me go! Oh, Bernard, do let me go!"

He let go one of her wrists and lead her to the door.

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"Remember," he said, his face close to hers, "not a sound!"

JESSICA never knew how she found her way down the long passage, and into her father's room. She was as one hypnotized by terror. During the five minutes of her absence the man paced her bedchamber like a caged beast.

Occasionally he held his brows in both hands, and as he walked he looked feverishly from right to left. He was decidedly not normal. His was a case of nerves strung almost to the pitch of madness. When Jessica reentered the room, a white wraith, frail and shrinking, he snatched the notes from her fingers, then gave a suppressed cry of rage. There were only two of them for five pounds each.

"Is that all?" he whispered.

"Every penny," answered Jessica. He made a movement. "Oh, Bernard, do believe me!"

He thrust the notes and Jessica's seven pounds in his pocket.

She was holding her father's pistol gingerly in her fingers. He snatched that, too, and made toward the window; he paused there and looked at her for a minute. Something of humanity crept back into his feverish eyes—then he went softly out on to the balcony. Jessica heard him drop into the garden below. Then she staggered to the bed and fell upon it.

TWO hours later she rose heavily from the bed, her face was drawn and agonized. No moon shone now, but the room was bright from the still burning light of the chandelier overhead and the pink-shaded lamp by her side.

Alone on the table by her pillow was O'Farrel's rose. She tottered round the bed and took it from its glass—then she pressed it passionately to her lips. For a minute she stood thus, holding the rose in both hands, adoring it with her eyes, then she let it drop from her fingers and collapsed to the floor, her face buried in her hands.

CHAPTER XI

PERPLEXITIES

IT WAS a little after nine o'clock next morning when O'Farrel strode into Major Masefield's breakfast-room.

Masefield, glancing over the top of his morning paper, began an amused remonstrance at this early visit. But O'Farrel's face was grave. Of course he had told himself that his visit was for the entirely serious purpose of acquainting Masefield with the incidents that had last night taken place at Yannion House.

Nevertheless his eye swept the room for the gracious presence that he had pictured at the foot of the table. He had particularized this picture so minutely in his mind that he had foreseen even a certain look that she would give him, at his entrance—that quick all-tender glance a woman offers only to the man who has won her heart.

"I have not come to pay a call," said O'Farrel, a little embarrassed at Masefield's smile of raillery; "it is about that other affair."

Masefield looked surprised.

"There were further developments last night," went on O'Farrel.

Masefield folded his paper, then moved over and seated himself at the fireside.

"Jessica won't be down yet a while. Her maid's just taken up breakfast."

He knew nothing of the violent scene that had been enacted a few hours before under his own roof. He knew nothing of the abstraction of his revolver and the two five-pound notes.

"Well," said O'Farrel when they were both seated, "Yannion House was entered last night, and the despatch-boxes in a secret cupboard in Yannion's study were rifled."

He gave the circumstances in detail, and Masefield expressed his amazement at the audacity of such a visit, especially after the arrest of Ezra Lion.

"I should have thought that would have given him the tip," he said, "to show the district a clean pair of heels."

He still believed that the visitor was no other than Yannion's former valet, and O'Farrel dropped a bombshell at his feet when at the end of his recital he said:

"In my opinion Yannion is still alive. Look here, Masefield, last night, after I left you, I began to think about Ezra Lion. His behavior didn't strike me as that of a man guilty of murder or even accessory to a crime of that sort. You've told me his history and up till now he appears to have led an honest and straightforward life. If he possessed any characteristic out of the ordinary, it was merely a rather exag-

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gerated and feudal loyalty to the Yannion family. His ancestors had served the Yannions for three hundred years; and Ezra belongs in fact to a fine aristocracy of labor.

"It is hardly conceivable that such a man would murder his Squire in such a foul and cowardly manner, especially when there appeared nothing to gain. That night, when he held me down by the throat and spoke to some one in the darkness, he didn't speak as an uncle to a delinquent nephew; he spoke as a devoted servant might speak to his master, in deadly peril. And the man who spoke back to him as we were lying there upon the floor called him Ezra. That in itself is suspicious.

"Curiously enough I thought of these things before I discovered the broken-open despatch-boxes, which finally convinced me that we had been on the track of the wrong man. Of course, it is conceivable that Yannion's valet knew of that secret cupboard, but it is scarcely probable."

When a man has passed middle age he finds it difficult to root out at short notice a series of preconceived ideas in favor of an eruption of new ones, however exigent those new ones may happen to be. Major Masefield was in this predicament and O'Farrel, though he was able to shake the elder man's preconceived idea of the murder, could not bring him to believe that Yannion was still alive and was possibly himself a murderer.

WHEN O'Farrel left him two hours later he was still in this state of mind. Perhaps O'Farrel had unconsciously lengthened the discussion in the hope that Jessica might appear, but in this he was disappointed. The blow that had struck down Jessica had not yet extended itself to him, but the sword was again suspended.

He had been a man moving on the outskirts of a tragedy, and out of the exceptional and exciting incidents through which he had lived he had drawn something splendid and glorious—he had won a woman's heart and he had lost his own.

After all, now that suspicion had been removed from Masefield, he could not be expected to allow a crime against a man he had never known to darken his own happiness, and he left Masefield's house with a light heart; he was counting the hours till he should see Jessica again. And Jessica?

She was lying propped on her pillows, and a devoted maid soothed her temples with a handkerchief saturated in eau de Cologne and water. For her the blow had fallen indeed. Like the white rose at her bedside, she was crushed and broken. She realized only too clearly what that visit of last night meant—it meant a life-long enchainment to a man she did not love. It meant separation from another to whom she had given her heart. After the first passionate gust of weeping she had shed no tears. There had been only a desolate moaning in her heart—a feeble pleading for deliverance from an overwhelming sentence.

So many motherless girls run the risk of this annihilation of their happiness. Jessica's story contained no subtleties. She had known Bernard Yannion all her life. His curious character had repelled her as a child. When he returned from Cambridge, however, a certain dashing "man of the world" air that he had acquired fascinated her. They had fallen in love, or rather Yannion had fallen in love, and his singular character made an easy conquest of her mind. His was one of those weak and gusty natures that are feeble and obstinate by turns. Unfortunately for Jessica, one of these periods of obstinacy was uppermost when a quarrel took place between him and Major Masefield.

With the cocksureness of a newly-fledged university man, he regarded Masefield as a fogy and a duffer of the old school; and when he was forbidden access to the house he descended to the meanness of leading the girl into a marriage at a registry office. Jessica was seventeen when that secret marriage took place. Jessica knew nothing of marriage; she felt only that she had proved her loyalty to the man she thought she loved.

Masefield suspected nothing when his daughter, after a morning's absence, returned home to lunch, and kissed him with rather more than ordinary impulsiveness. Soon after this Yannion went to London, and there fell under the fascination of a creature of superb and peacock-like magnificence. She was a lady who obtained an honest living in a saloon bar, and, in the crude judgment of Bernard Yannion, her charms easily paled the attractions of the child Jessica.

This affair of Yannion's was a fortunate thing for the girl, for she herself, almost

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from the moment they had shaken hands and parted outside the registry office, felt that what she had mistaken for love had been nothing more than a girlish fancy for the first eligible man who presented himself.

The significance of the step she had taken with Yannion had naturally never presented itself to her in all its awful possibilities until the night before when O'Farrel had proposed to her. She had felt sorry, of course, that Yannion was dead, but underneath this sorrow there had been a vast sensation of relief; his death meant freedom and possible happiness.

Then, almost before she had time to realize these things, there had come that visitation of the night—that return, as it were, of a dead man from his grave.

Lying now on her pillows with the morning light on the drawn blinds of her room, she shuddered again at the memory of that narrow face that had suddenly raised itself and looked into hers. Against her will she was forced to visualize and revisualize that scene; she was forced again to hear the echoes of his wild words, and the terror he had inspired was present with her now, even in the broad light of day. She had not yet connected him with the crime of the well. She wondered vaguely and uneasily why he had been so insistent in his demands for her father's revolver.

CHAPTER XII

THE HUNTED DEAD MAN

THAT same evening O'Farrel, looking particularly handsome in evening clothes, was leaning against the fireplace of the drawing-room at Yannion House.

The room was lighted with soft-shaded lamps, an installation of O'Farrel's own. For Major Masefield, in renting the house for him, had done everything in his power to make it comfortable. He had overcome O'Farrel's natural scruples as to the financial peculiarities of the case, and he had impressed on the younger man the fact, that, consenting to live there, he had constituted himself an amateur detective justly entitled to accept remuneration for his work.

It was nearly seven o'clock in the evening, and for the last hour O'Farrel had practically counted the minutes. As the clock chimed the first stroke of the hour, he heard the soft grind of Masefield's brougham on the gravel outside. He had opened the drawing-room window despite the coldness of the night, so that he might be quickly apprised of his guests' arrival. He closed the window now, poked the fire briskly, then went to the door. Jessica entered, preceding her father.

She was no longer in mourning for Yannion, but the white dress she wore, though it perhaps softened the pallor of her face, could not hide the tragedy in her eyes. She had been brave; she had decided to face at once the thing that was to be. Her first thought, when her father had reminded her of O'Farrel's invitation, was to refuse, but she knew it was no good hiding the truth; it had to be faced.

O'Farrel glanced at her with startled eyes as she held out that slender hand, pallid as a lily. He took it in his warm strong grasp and found it cold as ice.

Major Masefield shook hands with him perfunctorily, murmured a pretext, then turned and left the room, closing the door behind him. This had been done at Jessica's earlier request, and O'Farrel felt a prescience of evil.

Jessica, her lips pressed together, her eyes never crossing his, moved to the hearth and warmed her chilled hands at the blaze.

Then she tried to speak, but stopped. O'Farrel was motionless in the middle of the room. He knew that something had arisen between them—he felt the severance even before she uttered any words; he felt helpless and bewildered.

Jessica began to speak, her eyes on the fire, her back toward him. Her words came falteringly, slowly.

"At first I thought I could not come to-night." Her speech broke the spell.

O'Farrel sprang forward and clasped her in his arms.

"No, no," she whispered, "you mustn't touch me."

Gently, but resolutely, she released herself, and of a sudden he saw tears on her cheeks; she dashed them away bravely and held her eyes to his.

"Something has happened," she said. "I can't tell you what now. I want you to forget all that you said to me—last night. All that I said to you——"

O'Farrel held her in his arms, and this time she was passive for a moment. O'Farrel was whispering, his face close to hers:

"Jessica, you love me? You love me?"

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"Yes, yes!" whispered the girl, and again she put him from her, but this time she held his hands in hers. "And do you love me?" she said in a voice that quavered and broke.

"I worship you!" said O'Farrel.

She held him from her with gentle upraised hands.

"Then you'll be brave with me," she said; "you'll help me to bear, what—what I have to bear?"

"What is it?" said O'Farrel passionately. "What is this thing that has arisen? It is not twenty-four hours since I held you in my arms and you told me you were the happiest woman in the world."

Then he saw that she was on the point of breaking down, and sympathy for her made him lead her to a chair.

"Jessica, you shall tell me later. You know I love you, and, whatever has happened, I know in my heart that you love me."

He was bending down, his hands on her drooping shoulders; lightly and almost without her knowledge he kissed her hair. Major Masefield, reëntering the room, found them thus, and he turned away with elaborate discretion, a glow in his old heart at the sight.

DURING dinner Jessica fought with all her strength to hide her feelings from her father, and O'Farrel, abstracted and miserable, strove hard to maintain an air of cheerfulness. This dinner, at which he had first figured as host, had first entertained the girl he loved, was grotesquely different from what he had imagined; and it was with a sigh of relief that he was at last able to rise and hold the door for Jessica's egress into the drawing-room.

O'Farrel was scheming in his mind how to obtain a further talk with her, and as Masefield smoked a cigarette and drank his usual after-dinner glass of port, he thought of boldly mentioning the fact, and would have done so had not a servant entered to say that Detective Miles was outside and wished to see him.

Miles entered and plunged into explanations.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen, but things are moving." He paused to allow his next words to attain their full importance. "The man's hiding in this house!"

"What man?" asked Masefield.

"The man who escaped from the vault. Mr. Yannion's valet who was in league with Ezra Lion."

"In this house?" said O'Farrel sharply.

"I saw him enter by a back window not five minutes ago," went on the detective. "I've got Gospel watching outside now. He can't escape from the house without coming out of the ground floor, so if two of us watch the outside and one of us searches here, we shall have him!"

For once in his life Miles was frankly and openly excited.

"When you told me about the broken-open despatch-boxes this morning," went on Miles to O'Farrel, "I had a sort of feeling that he'd come here again, and I watched the house from the other side of the wall. I think we've got him at last," he concluded, "but we mustn't waste a minute. He's the quickest man on his feet I ever knew."

It fell to O'Farrel to arrange the disposition of forces. He persuaded Masefield to guard the north end of the house, and Miles to guard the other end. The watchers were to post themselves in such a position as to control two sides of the house each.

Masefield, standing at the back corner of the building, controlled the entire back of the house and also the north end. Miles' position enabled him to see all that went on at the front and at the south end. Joseph Gospel, under the direction of Miles, acted as patrol and carried his old-fashioned fowling-piece.

O'Farrel had walked to the front door with Miles, briefly explaining his new theories as to the murder, but Miles was too occupied with the events of the moment to take in what he said.

When O'Farrel had seen Masefield and the detective depart for their posts, he closed and locked the front door of the house in accordance with the arrangement they had made together. Then he made a careful tour of the lower windows and fastened them all. He made a rapid search of each room as he passed through it, but he was convinced that, if the fugitive was in the building, he had made his way to the upper stories.

Even at that time of tension and when discoveries were imminent, O'Farrel could not resist the temptation to seek out Jessica in the small drawing-room. He was anxious that she should not be frightened by anything that might take place, and he passed quickly out of the dining-room into

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the small softly-lit drawing-room which Jessica had entered after dinner. She was not there, and the door leading into the corridor was wide open.

O'Farrel stood wondering. There were evidences that she had departed suddenly; a silver spoon lay on the hearth-rug. O'Farrel picked it up mechanically and placed it in the coffee saucer. He walked to the door and glanced down the long corridor, dimly lighted by a lamp on an oak chest at the far end. There was no sign of Jessica. He called her name softly, but no answer came to him. He remembered the first day he had spent in that lonely house, and the oppression he had felt then came back to him.

He looked down into the garden below and caught a glimpse of Joseph Gospel striding slowly past, his gun at a ready angle. O'Farrel remembered that he had not armed himself and went to his bedroom and got his revolver. Then he made a search of that floor, but found no trace of Jessica, or of the man who had climbed in by the window.

HE WENT up-stairs to the second floor and as he mounted on the thick carpet he heard voices issuing from a room along the corridor at the back of the house. With infinite caution he advanced toward the sounds, and suddenly he heard Jessica's voice pleading! He forgot everything then until he found himself looking in at the study door and found Jessica crouching back in a chair. A man was bending over, his face thrust close to hers. He was sallow and slightly built; O'Farrel had not yet seen his eyes. He was saying to Jessica, in tones almost shrill with intensity:

"You will do as I tell you—I tell you, you will!"

O'Farrel made a run into the room and flung himself bodily at the intruder, but the man had seen him approaching, his hand flew to his pocket and his eyes looked into O'Farrel's face. They crashed together to the carpet. O'Farrel had seen that movement toward the coat pocket, and he was just in time to grab a lean hand that was holding Major Masefield's automatic pistol. The struggle after that was brief; the intruder was no match for O'Farrel and in five minutes he was seated, conquered and gasping, in the armchair from which Jessica had risen.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MYSTERY SOLVES ITSELF

O'FARREL, seeing the pallor that came over the captive's face as he leaned back in the chair, his breath coming in gasps, allowed Jessica to go into the next room for a glass of water.

"What do you want with me?" said the man.

"You're caught at last," said O'Farrel; "there's no escape. The house is guarded outside."

The man's eyes turned toward the revolver which O'Farrel had placed on the desk out of his reach.

"No, no," said O'Farrel, "you won't get that again!"

"Do you know who I am?" went on the man with quick earnestness.

"You are Bernard Yannion," said O'Farrel.

"Ah," answered the other, obviously relieved. "I—I thought you mistook me for somebody else. You say the house is guarded," he went on after a pause. "Why is it guarded?"

O'Farrel's instinct was to say, "Who should know that better than you?" but a feeling for this man, at last trapped and helpless, caused him to refrain. He knew he was in the presence of a man who had committed a murder, and he was surprised at his own tolerance toward him.

Jessica was returning with the water and O'Farrel spoke rapidly.

"What were you saying to Miss Masefield when I came in?"

"I was saying I needed money," returned Yannion coolly.

"You were threatening her?"

"Not exactly threatening her, merely exercising the authority a husband is entitled to exercise over his wife."

O'Farrel fell back as if he had received a heavy blow in the face. At that moment, had Yannion taken his opportunity, he could have seized the revolver and escaped from the room. But Jessica was standing there, the glass of water in her hand. She saw O'Farrel's changed face, the agonized questions in his eyes. She inclined her head slowly, affirmatively.

"Then it's true?" whispered O'Farrel hoarsely. "It's true?"

"Of course it's true. Why shouldn't it

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be true?" said Yannion irritably. Then he turned to Jessica. He drank the glass of water at a gulp.

"Look here, Jessica," he said, "I want you to get me out of this. You know I want to go abroad. This person tells me there are men out there trying to get me, but it's all a mistake, you see. They're searching for some one else, and because I happen to climb into my own house, as I am perfectly entitled to do, they suspect me of—I don't know what."

O'Farrel, stunned by the sudden blow that had been struck at his happiness, stared at the man in the chair and the white-robed girl, standing apart in the room, as if they were creatures from another planet, performing strange and incomprehensible rites. The situation had slipped entirely from his comprehension, and in those first few minutes before he mastered himself he was overwhelmed by a sudden flare of anger, a desire to seize this murderer by the throat and drag him out to his just deserts.

For a second he exulted to think that the man before him was laid by the heels, trapped, doomed—and then again he was ashamed of that manifestation of primal brutality.

Jessica made no answer to Yannion's speech, and suddenly he sprang up and extended his hands to O'Farrel.

"For God's sake," he said, "help me to get out of this! You've got a good face; you wouldn't see me taken on an unjust charge?"

O'Farrel could not bring himself to face those eyes. He turned away.

"It's murder," he said in a half whisper. "I couldn't get them away if I tried. That man, Miles, has been tracking you for weeks."

"Hush, hush," interjected Yannion, his voice almost a scream, and looked at Jessica, who had been watching him with wide eyes.

She was swaying now, but with a mighty effort she drew herself up. Her lips whispered a word, but neither O'Farrel or Yannion heard it.

"Look here," said Yannion, with a sudden change of tone. There was a querulous note of indignation in his voice now. "You have no right to say that"—he broke off suddenly—"besides, what do you mean by murder—who's murdered?"

"Your valet," said O'Farrel.

Something in O'Farrel's manner seemed to hearten him. He was a man at bay, fighting for his life, and there was one chance. Despite O'Farrel's words he felt he could win the interest of these two—if he could have but these two friends in the world he might yet escape.

There was something daring and desperate in his scheme, for he had no power of guessing how much O'Farrel knew, but he had an instinct that it was a good deal. He resolved to make his last cast by telling the truth. At his request O'Farrel consented to close the door.

THE picture of that room, lighted by a single lamp taken from the corridor, will linger in O'Farrel's memory to the end of his life. The man before him, strung almost to madness by the horror of his situation, paced the floor swiftly as a wild beast paces its cage, and as he walked he darted searching glances at O'Farrel. Incessantly he moistened his lips with his tongue.

When he began to speak, Jessica's elbows rested on the chair-arms and her face, turned toward the wall, was enclosed in her slender hands, hiding her eyes from the two men. She sat thus until Yannion had finished his narrative. Once only she moved.

"I'll begin at the beginning," said Yannion. He stared abruptly at O'Farrel, who, with his back to the mantel-shelf, on which lay the pistol, was watching him closely. "It is an awful thing to say, but I did kill Ezra Lion's nephew!" There was a long pause, then he resumed: "When he had been my valet for less than a month I suspected him of theft. I called him into this room one evening and charged him. He stood where you stand now and I sat in that chair," he pointed to the vacant armchair at the desk side.

"He was a stealthy-looking fellow with light blue eyes and white lashes and there was an offensive cockney impudence about him as he denied my accusations and refused to allow me to have his boxes searched. I insisted on doing this, however, and took a candle to the servants' quarters on the top story. The terrible climax came in the simplest manner possible. I was thoroughly angry by now and threw open his boxes with little ceremony.

"Hidden among his clothes I found at least a hundred pounds' worth of household

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plate belonging to me." Yannion paused in his walk and remained silent for a minute. "For his uncle's sake," he went on again, "I decided merely to kick him into the road. He seems to have relied on this, for he was most exasperatingly cool about the whole business. I pushed him before me out of the bedroom, telling him what I thought of him. At the head of the attic stairs he turned and was grossly insolent to me.

"His attitude so maddened me that I wrenched a mace from the wall and struck at him. My blow, which was not a violent one, missed him. He laughed at that, whether in nervousness or in mockery I never knew, but that laugh was his death knell. I raised the mace again and crashed it down on his skull from behind. He dropped to his knees, then pitched forward, rolling and bumping from the top to the bottom of the stairs. He lay there in a grotesque attitude with his mouth and his eyes wide open, and I stood looking down at him, wondering what had happened.

"I dragged him at last to an empty room and all that night I lay awake with the consciousness sweeping over me that people would call it 'murder.'"

Jessica moved slightly. The two men glanced at her, but her eyes were still turned to the wall, her hands still shielded her face.

"You see it wasn't murder," went on Yannion. "In strict fact it was an accident." He lowered his voice now so that only O'Farrel could catch his words. "The next night I dropped his body in the well. I had to carry him there in my arms; his eyes were still wide open and I had begun to get afraid of him. I thought what had happened would never be discovered, but if the body was found I had arranged that every one should think it was mine—that I was the victim. Before disposing of it, I had dressed the body in a suit of my clothes, but he was staring at me all the time and this made me forget something—I forgot to give him a pair of my boots.

"I should be safe in America at this moment but for that. I was at Liverpool with my passage booked when I suddenly remembered the omission. For days I walked the streets of that town cogitating, beating my brains as to whether I should come back or not. At last I could bear it no longer. I felt that my life depended on getting rid of those boots. I returned two nights before the body was found in the well.

"I was there that night, hiding among the trees, and I saw Joseph Gospel lay his coat over it. For the next few hours I was like a raving madman. Those boots were scheming to convict me after all. Without them an unrecognizable body in my clothes would be taken for granted, but a pair of the valet's boots on my body would lead to questions. I decided to steal the gruesome thing, and I did it alone." At that instant Yannion's jaw dropped. "That wasn't anybody in the corridor, was it?" he asked, a ghastly pallor suddenly leaping into his cheeks.

"No," said O'Farrel, "it was your fancy."

In the silence that followed, he permitted Yannion to tiptoe to the door and peer out. He saw nothing, but as he returned he wiped drops of perspiration from his cold brow.

"That night," went on Yannion, "I seemed to possess the strength and cunning of ten men. The key of the vault I got from this room. Then I loaded Stringer's cart with hay to deaden the fall of the coffin. I did not want suspicion to fall on him, so I took a horse from Major Masefield's stable. There was a combination lock there which I knew the wording of, as I was with him in Wallbridge when he bought it, two years ago. Having got the coffin from the window I rode on the cart with it and only stepped on the road once when I carried the coffin on my back diagonally across the common——"

Yannion had stopped and was again listening.

"Go on," said O'Farrel in a low voice.

"There is little more to tell. On the night when the detective followed me as I dashed out of the vault, I had been there to remove the valet's boots. I had them with me and I weighted them with stones and sunk them in Ezra Lion's pond."

"They were produced at the inquest," said O'Farrel, "together with your own boots found in the vault."

"Yes, I was too late to finish what I had set out to do."

"Detective Miles says you disappeared that night as if the earth had swallowed you?" questioned O'Farrel.

"I disappeared into Stringer's barn. There is a hanging door there near the ground, which I guessed he would not know of."

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Yannion paused a while, then explained how it came that the valet was supposed to have left the village. He purposely engaged Stringer to take the valet's boxes to Wallbridge. It was night at the time and the valet apparently walked into the town on foot. In reality it was Yannion who went. Then, in answer to a question from O'Farrel, Yannion explained that he broke into Yannion House that evening in a further search for money to get him to Canada. He had forwarded all his funds to Vancouver and he needed money for a new steamship ticket.

"Ezra Lion knew all the time that you were in the village?"

"Yes," said Yannion, "but he knew no circumstances of the—accident to his nephew. I think he guessed, but he was loyal to me. Nothing could make him believe me guilty. Those letters were written to shield me—to pretend that his nephew was still alive.

"He gave me shelter in a loft over his forge, and every day he urged me to get away, but I could not go until I had fulfilled my mission, and I could not confide that mission to him. So the poor fellow conceived a violent hatred of those who were trying to hunt me down."

"Yes, he attacked me twice," said O'Farrel.

DURING his story Yannion only once glanced at Jessica. He was sure of her sympathy. He knew that it was against her nature to harm any living thing. But O'Farrel he watched narrowly, noting every change of expression on his face, and as he listened O'Farrel felt himself growing sympathetic against his better judgment. Nevertheless, his sense of equity rose in revolt against the cruel predicament in which he and Jessica found themselves. He began to see clearly now that if they were to be happy together it could only be at the price of this man's life. Yannion stood before him a self-confessed murderer. It was his duty as a good citizen to hand him over to justice.

Yannion, watching his face, had no knowledge of what was passing in his mind. He had not even guessed at O'Farrel's love for Jessica.

"This man is guilty of murder," whispered a deep voice in O'Farrel's being. Thus spoke the voice, but it was beyond his power to obey it. He sought Jessica's eyes and found they were upon him, wondering, questioning, relying on his strength and on his wisdom.

And, at last, when Yannion ceased speaking, when his voice trailed into nothing and he looked into O'Farrel's face with the pitiful, mute question: "What are you going to with me?" O'Farrel turned away almost overcome. He went to Jessica; for a minute their eyes held each other, forgetting the man behind them. Then he took her hand and gripped it. After a minute he turned slowly.

"I'll help you," he said; "I'll do all in my power to help you." In uttering these words he saw his own happiness topple to the ground and lie in ruins at his feet. Jessica rose heavily as one in a dream. It was she who had prompted this sacrifice and she went unsteadily out of the room, not meeting O'Farrel's eyes. She left the door wide open behind her.

Yannion was clasping both O'Farrel's hands in his, pouring out abject and piteous words of gratitude. O'Farrel strove to steady him.

"It won't be easy," he said. "There are three of them guarding the house—we must——"

He had got as far as this, when a sudden scream from Jessica sent him leaping toward the corridor, and as he went he heard her voice raised in wild protest.

"No! No! You sha'n't go! No! No! No!"

Yannion for an instant stood paralyzed in the middle of the floor; then in an agony of fear he sprang for the revolver on the mantel-shelf.

When he turned again Detective Miles was watching him from the threshold. There was a triumphant look in the detective's eyes, those unpleasant eyes, odd in color; his usually pallid face was flushed, and as he moved warily toward his prey he caressed one side of his long mustache with his left hand. Yannion guessed who he was; for a moment he wavered and seemed inclined to raise his hand, then terror seized him and he fled into the bedroom.

He was gone in a flash and the next second he had crossed the small bedchamber and was out in the corridor. Silently and rapidly Miles followed him, but when the detective reached the corridor Yannion was already leaping up the narrow stairs to the

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servants' quarters at the top of the house.

The stairs were in darkness and as Miles mounted cautiously, O'Farrel, who had placed Jessica in a chair in the study, came out with the lamp which he held aloft.

Yannion had disappeared and Miles was half-way up the stairs when O'Farrel began to mount in his wake. There were vague notions in his mind of getting Miles away by explaining that the man in the darkness above was armed and desperate. He did even go so far as to call softly, "Miles! Miles!"

The detective paid no heed. A door on the top landing slammed heavily. Now, at last, Miles waited on the top step and allowed O'Farrel to come up to him.

"The third door," said the detective, raising his hand and pointing. He had not finished his sentence when a pistol-shot sent crashing and reverberant echoes out to them.

Then followed an awful silence, broken at length by the thud of a falling body. Miles flashed a swift glance at O'Farrel.

"My God, he's shot himself!" said O'Farrel and, dashing forward, he flung open the closed door.

Bernard Yannion was lying there at peace at last, clutching the pistol in his lean hand.

A YEAR later O'Farrel entered Kursaal at Mountreux with a little cone of tissue-paper in his hand. Jessica, who was sitting at a sunlit table with her father, now looking at least five years younger, glanced up questioningly.

"That is for you," said O'Farrel.

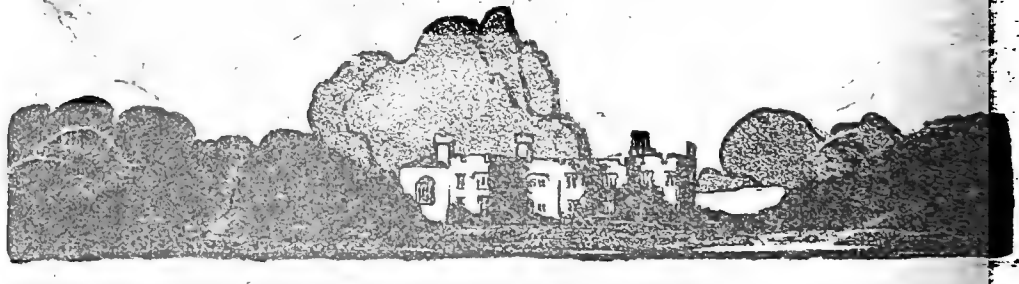
But it was not until they were alone, until Major Masefield, with a private smile to himself, had wandered out to the *Petit Chevaux* table in a distant room, that she opened the paper and disclosed—a white rose.

"Oh, thank you," said Jessica. She broke into a smile of pleasure at the beauty of the flower. Then she raised it to her lips and paused. "Had you any special reason for bringing me a white rose?" she asked.

"Yes," said O'Farrel.

"Because the other was bruised and broken?"

O'Farrel smiled at her. Then in the glaring publicity of the Kursaal she looked at him tenderly and kissed her sparkling third finger.



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Of The College Indian
Who Stole A New York Girl

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IS HE in a monastery in Luzon? Or was he executed in Australia? Was he just a plain, all-around beast and villain, or should the halo of romance shed its light over his violent deeds? Where did he come from? Where is he now? Who was he—or is he?

Bully Hayes—every one who knows the South Seas or has read about them knows that name. In the field of real, modern adventure he looms up in giant size. The record of the things attributed to the man is amazing—and appalling. He was known to people still living, yet mystery shrouds his whole career and the estimates of him are various and contradictory. And he vanished—unexplained and unexplaining.

Somewhere around 1886, I am told, Louis Beck turned up in Australia after considerable time spent with Bully Hayes himself and eventually handed over some diaries and note-books to Rolf Bolderwood, who used these unique data as the basis for his novel "A Modern Buccaneer." Bully Hayes has figured in many another fiction tale—in one of H. D. Couzens' stories in ADVENTURE. But how about the *facts?*

Where is he? Is he alive or dead? Who was he? *What* was he? Apparently there is no one who can, or will, furnish the answers to these questions. But among all those who read these lines there must be some who can help build up the truth. If you can contribute anything, send it in and let's see whether we can't, among us, work our way into this mystery.

APACHES, Mexican half-breeds, Navajos, fugitives from justice, Harvard, the stage, journalism, the study of crime in San Francisco's Chinatown before the earthquake, in New York's slums and from the Prefecture of Police in Paris to certain doorways of the Dundukoff Boulevard in Sofia, Bulgaria—too many things have happened to John Kemble to be crowded into a paragraph. As a boy he saw men shot both in open border warfare and from ambush, and all his life he has been deeply interested in the criminal problems of the world. So when you read "The Parlof Ruby" you are getting a story of the world of crime from one who knows.

THAT H. Hesketh Prichard, F.R.G.S., F.Z.S., F.A.I., "knows his Patagonia" will be plain enough when you read his article on "The Wild Man of Santa Cruz," but this restless Englishman hasn't limited his explorations to South America. Labrador, Newfoundland and Haiti have all fallen before his desire for adventure and his interest in natural history. Yet he has found time to write half a score of books and his name is familiar to magazine readers on both sides of the Atlantic.

WHEN Mr. G. W. Ogden dropped into the office the other day on a visit from Kansas City, we learned for the first time that "Sen Askew's $10,000 Ride" in the January number was practically a true story. "The Pirates' Broth" in this issue is another good tale built on actual facts.

SOMEHOW it seems adventurous to have been born in India, though I suppose almost anybody can prove that it is not. Anyhow, George C. Hull followed it up by living a few years in the "moonshine belt" of East Tennessee, ten years in Colorado and two years in the army, having been present at the fall of Manila and during the insurrecto campaign. "The Fat Head God o' Luck" came to us from San Francisco, where Mr. Hull is now a newspaperman, but it harks back to his birthplace, India.

CAPTAIN W. ROBERT FORAN—how often I've started to tell about him on this little monthly page and given it up each time in the face of the overwhelming number of his exciting adventures! But there will be a chance before long, and meanwhile his interesting article on page 852 will add to what you have already learned about him from his ADVENTURE contributions in the past. This time it is his adventures with African lions.

EDWARD ALEXANDER PHILLIPS is another writer-adventurer who has seen and done far too much to be chronicled in a single page. There's no use beginning, so I'll end. But in the end I'll begin.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN

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